



THOSE WHO HOLD EVERYTHING:

The Rematriation of Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, and Gender-Diverse People's Human Rights and the Obligations of All Governments





About the Cover Art:

Ancestral Women Taking Back Their Dresses (1990)

The first time I travelled to Europe to visit museum collections, I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of cultural material from across the globe. I was looking for “our stuff” and I found it. When I got back, the first thing people would ask was, “Did you bring them back?” It was difficult to explain, to older people in particular, why I couldn’t do that. I couldn’t explain it to myself. One day when I was feeling very frustrated, I thought, “The only way we’re ever going to get that stuff back is if those women, the artists, just go there and get it.” So these are my superheroes, and my imaginary vindication. Our female ancestors fly across the ocean, invade the museums and take back our possessions. The women have blasted the doors of the museum open, thrown their cotton print dresses away, and reclaimed their traditional dresses. Every dress in the painting is a real dress in a museum collection. I felt much better after I finished. By painting this I took something back. I brought them home.

– Sherry Farrell Racette (Métis, Anishinaabe-Algonquin, and Irish)

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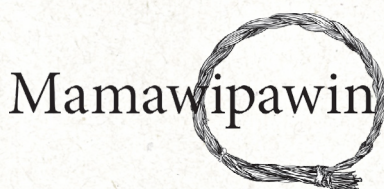
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*Artwork by
Micaela Gilbert*

Executive Summary

This project examines the interconnected historical and contemporary factors contributing to the systemic marginalization of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. While working on this project, the rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada and abroad have faced significant threats, including the reversal of hard-won rights. Growing neo-fascist sentiments and far-right movements continue to threaten these rights. Here in Manitoba, the province in which our research team is based, violence against Indigenous women and girls, including violence directed at elected members of Manitoba's legislature was occurring as we wrote this report. These acts of violence reinforce findings that the intersectional impact of settler colonialism in Canada remains a gendered and racialized project.

Objectives

Inspired by and responding directly to the Calls for Justice offered in the National Inquiry on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report, in particular Call 1.4 which demands “urgent and special measures to ensure that Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people are represented in... governance and leadership,” this project contributes to the ongoing work of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin who are actively working to stop a genocide through their leadership and governance. The aim of this project is to propose new systems of governance and expressions of self-determination which centre gendered realities.

Methods

Guided by Indigenous feminist methodologies, this project used a relational and collaborative process that centred Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people's knowledge, leadership, and lived experience. The project combined critical engagement with literature across Indigenous Studies, law, politics, history, and human rights and included a literature review, collective reading practices, Kitchen Table Gatherings, and story-based learning led by Indigenous matriarchs. Together, these approaches supported knowledge-sharing, reflection, and accountability grounded in relationships, care, and responsibility to community.



Key Findings

1. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin play key roles in governance and leadership, working within and outside of settler colonial systems. The goals of leaders in Indigenous communities and Nations are the health and safety of their relatives in their community, whether urban or rural.

2. The leadership of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin is not recognized as governance because it exists, and persists, outside of dispossessory hierarchical state structures.

3. Matriarchy and leadership are taught to Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin through ceremony, visiting, and teachings.

4. Human rights mechanisms (e.g., United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights) must be acknowledged and implemented within municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal law and policy.

5. Violence against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin is ongoing and can be traced back to colonial systems, stereotypes, and ongoing colonial structures.

6. Recommendations and proposed Indigenous-led reparation frameworks found in the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential School's Final Report (2024), the final report of the National Inquiry on MMIWG (2019b), Manitoba's Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (1991b), and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) have not been respected or implemented. Municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal government inaction to implement these recommendations and policy changes demonstrates that the active genocide against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin is thus permissible.

7. Intergenerational knowledge transmission and mentors are important for Indigenous girls and gender-diverse youth. These relationships foster leadership, provide opportunities for youth to imagine their futures, gain new skills, and create important support networks for leaders of all ages throughout their lives.

8. Indigenous men in leadership positions may experience racism, however they also benefit from patriarchal systems and structures that negatively impact Indigenous women and gender-diverse kin in similar positions.

9. More resources, including parenting supports, are necessary to address systemic inequities experienced by Indigenous communities, in urban and rural settings.

10. Indigenous organizations and programs need sustainable funding commitments and resources to effectively support Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse kin, and families.

11. Indigenous Nations and Peoples are actively working together across Canada, including here in Winnipeg, to fundamentally change the realities of their kin creating healthy futures beyond the settler colonial state.

12. Settler colonial justice and accountability systems do not work for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin.

13. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are actively stopping a state-sponsored genocide.

14. A failure to acknowledge the leadership and governance of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin contributes to the ongoing genocide.

15. All levels of government must acknowledge, respect, and adhere to their obligations to ensure Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are fully and effectively participating in all aspects of decision-making processes.



Introduction

This project synthesizes knowledge about the interconnected historical and contemporary factors contributing to the systemic marginalization and dispossession of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people, and issues of governance, justice, resistance, resurgence, and rematriation. It draws on published literature and community engagement, and outlines policy changes that are rooted in the rights and dignity of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin that can contribute to building healthy, safe environments. Addressing gender violence must be at the core of resurgence practices and decolonization outside of the settler-state. Restoring Indigenous women's governance addresses historical and contemporary factors contributing to the marginalization of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin.

Utilizing Indigenous feminist strategies and networks, this project identifies the leadership of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin within and outside of normative Indigenous, federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Demonstrating the ongoing efforts and labour of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders, we offer new structures of leadership and government that centre kinship, responsibility, and the voices of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders. Beyond the literature, but connected to it via kinship networks, the ongoing labour and heart knowledge of Indigenous matriarchs have continued to be at the centre of resurgence and decolonization movements. Every day, Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin work to

actively create healthy futures with a deep care for their Nations.

This report and its policy recommendations are meant for Indigenous governments, and all levels of Canadian government including federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments. It may also have relevance in other settler colonial contexts. This report may be considered as a tool to be utilized in legal proceedings to demonstrate the work that has been done by Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders. We are hopeful that students and early career researchers in academia can lean on this report as a resource. Additionally, this report will be useful in considering how inclusive and meaningful participation of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin can be amplified at decision-making tables. Adopting a strengths-based approach, we urge readers and governments to follow the connections between colonial stereotypes and the continued violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. We have tried to include community leaders and go beyond written sources. But this report is not and cannot be everything. We hope that it contributes to ongoing necessary conversations to rematriate, learn from, and heighten the reach of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin's anti-genocidal work in their/our nations and communities.



Objectives

Synthesizing knowledge about Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin and the projects they have undertaken in response to well-established linkages between colonial stereotypes, heteropatriarchy, and state-sponsored violence, this report highlights key moments in history where Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders advocated and fought for rights, and for the land and waters, and changed the trajectory of the future. Recording these moments and drawing clear lines between them, as well as the previous and ongoing responses to injustices and miscarriages of justice against Indigenous People, we highlight the importance of previous inquiries and advocate for human rights mechanisms and data sovereignty. Restoring justice emphasizes Indigenous-led responses, frameworks, and governance broadly speaking, including when Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin go missing. With a goal to be used in real time, this report shifts the narrative of how inquires, reports, and their recommendations are not written to sit on a shelf or broaden a bibliography to which settler governments vaguely gesture. Rather, as inspired by Giganawenimaanaanig's work on the Red Dress Stories – Manitoba Project (2026), we wish it to be used as an evergreen memorial of the stories and voices we have heard and the words we have read. Each Indigenous woman, girl, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse relative is loved, cared for, respected, remembered, and honoured.

Methods

We approached this work through the lens of Indigenous feminism. Centring relationality, our approach involved finding,

valuing, and bringing existing knowledges into conversation. We accomplished this by centring Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin's knowledge, leadership, and lived experiences to create a history, library, and working resource.

Our literature review spanned across disciplines such as Indigenous Studies, law, politics, history, and human rights. Critically engaging with the project themes and associated literature provided a historical and contemporary understanding of colonialism as gendered and racist. Our reading methodology often necessitated reading 'between the lines' which can be defined as "expos[ing] gendered absences and community voices that may have fallen through the cracks" (Iapi debwewin aansaamb 2025, 80). Recognizing the importance of the literature that is there, and what is not, was influential. We worked to identify those voices that journals and publishing houses support, and the spaces where we must continue to amplify Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people's voices and work. And thus, we read case law, literature (e.g., novels, poetry, and essays), scholarly works, grey literature (e.g., webpages, government documents, reports, conference proceedings, theses), popular media, and human rights instruments.

Collaboratively, the team determined key words to determine our scope. Key words included but were not limited to: Chief, Band Council, colonialism, decolonization, capitalism, nationhood, storytelling, reconciliation, and resurgence. Our search was conducted in English and was geographically confined to Turtle Island with a focus on its northern parts. We prioritized scholarship and literature from Indigenous writers, thinkers, and academics. To honour our responsibilities to one another on the research team, we critically and



Kitchen Table Gatherings: 24 individuals

Includes community engagement sessions online and in-person.



Literature: 35

Includes poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and literature for children and young adults.



Scholarly Works: 109

Includes scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles, books, chapters, and conference presentations.



Grey Literature: 54

Includes reports from governments, international non-governmental organizations, blogs, presentations, and theses.



Popular Media: 17

Includes newspaper and magazine articles, podcasts, radio shows, and films.



Human Rights Instruments: 9

Includes national and international human rights instruments.



Legislation & Case Law: 6

Includes federal court decisions.

collaboratively read together and discussed readings and absences to facilitate a relational approach to our methods. While we examined literature from Two-Spirit and gender-diverse authors, and the issues impacting Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people, our analysis tends to focus on Indigenous women.

Gathering, sharing, reflection, and accountability informed our responsibilities to ground this work in relationality and care. In this way, we worked to disrupt the violent dispossession and dismissal of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse voices. Aligning with our relational approach, we understand the importance of including Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kins' voices within this research. Guided by Indigenous feminist frameworks of community engagement – so much organizing still begins and/or continues to happen around a kitchen table in someone's home – we held "Kitchen Table" discussions, where we shared a meal and visited with community leaders and matriarchs over the span of four separate occasions to breathe life into this work and guide our research.

One Kitchen Table was held at the University of Manitoba's Fort Garry Campus, another in Winnipeg's inner city, and a third online. A final Kitchen Table allowed participants to see and provide feedback on the final report. In total, twenty-four leaders generously shared their knowledge and expertise. Student researchers took notes of the conversations that occurred. The conversations also inspired the image on Page 21 of this report.

Terminology

This report was conducted within Winipek [Muddy Waters in Ininimowin] or the City of Winnipeg, located in Treaty One Territory, Dakota Oyate homelands, and the National homelands of the Red River Métis (Craft 2013; Sinclair 2024; Iapi debwewin aansaamb 2025). Winipek was and is home to a historical and central meeting place called Nistawayak/Nestawe'ya, also known as The Forks. This report makes no Nation specificity to honour the network of Indigenous relations who have worked together in place for generations (Sinclair 2024, 48–49).

Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer, and gender-diverse people: This project centers Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer, and gender-diverse people. In this, we aim to move away from a binary, colonial understanding of gender, and examine the range of different gender identities, presentations, and histories. In practice, the report focuses particularly on Indigenous women, and the work to better include the range of gendered and embodied experiences and expressions is ongoing and necessary.

For further information, please see **MMIWG2SLGBTQQIA+ National Action Plan Final Report (2SLGBTQQIA+ Sub Working Group 2021).**



Indigenous, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit: Our team includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. When we refer to Indigenous kin, we are mindful of the different relationships and responsibilities. This report utilizes the language of both First Nations and Indigenous, an umbrella terms for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Where necessary, we distinguish between First Nations and Indigenous. For example, when referencing the Indian Act, we speak of First Nations people in particular.

For further information, we suggest reading: Métis scholar, Chelsea Vowel's *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* with a particular emphasis on the first chapter, "Just Don't Call Us Late for Supper: Names for Indigenous Peoples" (2016).

Turtle Island: This report has included literature beyond jurisdictional boundaries of Canadian provinces, as well as the settler-states of Canada and the United States. This project expands all over Turtle Island, but with a specific focus on our place-based relations in Winnipeg, Manitoba on Treaty One lands.

Matriarchy: We draw on Indigenous feminist framing of “matriarchy” and “matriarch” that, as Jennifer Brant explains, are “rooted in community knowledges, specifically matriarchal worldviews, that have existed since time immemorial and govern our relations to our human and non-human kin” (2023, 17). Matriarchy is embedded in heart knowledge. It embeds responsibilities that begin in the home, that care for youth and healthy Indigenous futures. It is felt, experienced, and shared. It is a relational organizational structure that has been practiced since time immemorial. This framing of matriarchy is connected to another guiding concept, rematriation.

To learn more about Rematriation, see the University of Manitoba’s work on Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony <https://umanitoba.ca/indigenous/engagement/respectful-repatriation>

Tokenism: Tokenism refers to process when Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are expected to show up, but their work is extracted without proper recognition, acknowledgement, compensation, or relationship.

Genocide: A central component of this project has been centering the work of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019b). We adopt their findings and work from a recognition that this gendered and racialized violence of colonialism is indeed a genocide (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019a). Their definition states:

The significant, persistent, and deliberate pattern of systemic racial and gendered human rights and Indigenous rights violations and abuses – perpetuated historically and maintained today by the Canadian state, designed to displace Indigenous Peoples from their land, social structures, and governance and to eradicate their existence as Nations, communities, families, and individuals – is the cause of the disappearances, murders, and violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and is genocide. This colonialism, discrimination, and genocide explain the high rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

(National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019c, Vol. 1b, 174).

**“... this gendered and racialized violence
of colonialism is indeed a genocide.”**

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019

What We Learned

Colonial Stereotyping and Dispossession

Land and Body Intimacies

Leadership

Previous Reports: Where Justice Goes to Die

Legal Orders and Human Rights Mechanisms

Political Resistance and the Work of Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, and Gender-Diverse Kin

Systems and Institutions

Our knowledge synthesis project affirms the multifaceted ways that systemic oppression and discrimination overlap to perpetuate harm and disappears Indigenous bodies, lands, and political orders (Ladner 2014; Anderson 2016; A. Simpson 2016; Starblanket 2017; L. B. Simpson 2017; Knott 2018; Bourgeois 2018).

The settler state of Canada prides itself on its friendly demeanor, multicultural character, and its role as a peacekeeper, both at home and abroad (S. Razack 2002; Mackey 2005; J. S. Simpson et al. 2011). Yet such celebratory narratives (that are intricately tied to settler identity) (Bell 2014) conceal the state's colonial nature – one that vests itself in the disappearance and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples, specifically women, to accumulate land (Anderson 2016; L. B. Simpson 2014, 2017; Bourgeois 2018). The colonial projects' dispossessive nature procedurally seeks the violent erasure of Indigenous lands, bodies, knowledges, and Nations to assure its sovereignty. One of the ways it has facilitated this violence is through the attempted legislative removal of Indigenous women's leadership.

Prior to colonization (and the imposition of its corollary – patriarchy), Indigenous women held esteemed leadership roles in many nations (J. Green 1993; Monture-Angus 1995; Fontaine 2002; Ladner 2009; Gunn 2019; Starblanket 2024b). With settler colonialism and the implementation of heteronormative patriarchal systems, Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin experienced gender-based violence due to the ongoing state-sponsored genocide that requires their disappearance. However, the leadership and governance of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse kin has persisted and endured despite the violent realities they experience (Ace 2026). Mary Eberts (settler) argues that colonialism is both a racist and sexist regime (2014). Audra Simpson (Kahnawà:ke) reveals in her foundational text "The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty" that Indigenous bodies reflect alternative political orders which then require the state to disappear what challenges its authority (2016, 2). A. Simpson states, "First: Canada requires the death and so-called 'disappearance' of Indigenous women to

secure its sovereignty. Two: that this sovereign death drive then requires that we think about the ways in which we imagine not only nations and states, but what counts as governance itself” (2016, 1). Further, Helen Knott (Dane Zaa, Nehiyaw, and Métis) explains, settler colonialism is a structure that relies on the dispossession of Indigenous women from their governing structures and political roles to assume colonial dominance (2018).

In order to adequately understand colonialism, we need to include critical gender analysis (Monture-Angus 1995; Sayers et al. 2001; J. A. Green 2017a). It is only through an analysis attentive to gender that we can see how colonial institutions like the Indian Act continue perpetuate violence onto Indigenous women (Starblanket 2024a; J. A. Green 2017b). Within the literature there was overwhelming evidence that the removal of First Nation women from governance and systemic discrimination was legally facilitated through the Indian Act (J. A. Green 2001; Sayers et al. 2001; Voyageur 2011; R. Kuokkanen 2012; A. Simpson 2016; J. A. Green and Eberts 2017; L. B. Simpson 2017; Starblanket 2024a; Bourgeois 2024; Starblanket 2024b). The Indian Act excluded First Nations women from political participation until the 1950s, however broader exclusion from First Nations continues to today regardless of Bill C-31, because of the disproportionate application of law through the second-generation cut off-rule that predominantly affects women (Eberts et al. 2024). At present, Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are confronting the continual repercussions of colonial legislation and policies while simultaneously taking care of their relatives, pushing boundaries, and challenging racist and sexist structures and systems through their relational leadership and governance.

Colonial Stereotyping and Dispossession

Stereotypes and gendered myths specifically targeting Indigenous women have been utilized to fuel the to the dispossessive practice of colonialism to gain access to land (S. H. Razack 2000; Lawrence 2004; Anderson 2009; Eberts 2014; Anderson 2016; Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe 2016; J. A. Green 2017b; Eberts et al. 2024; LaRocque 2017; Good 2018; Olson 2023). Eberts et al., (2024) establishes that stereotypes about First Nations women were constructed to dispossess and legitimate First Nations women’s discrimination. Throughout the Kitchen Tables we held in September 2025, leaders shared that there is persistent dehumanization of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin in every sphere of life. This dehumanization is attributed to the historical and contemporary violent stereotypes and gendered myths the settler-state mobilizes to fuel the disappearance of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse political orders.





Idle No More protesters march from Victoria Island, where Theresa Spence and Raymond Robinson held their protest, to Parliament Hill in January 2012. Image Credit: Julie Oliver, Postmedia.

Land and Body Intimacies

Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are inherently connected to the land, and have responsibilities to the land, water, and more-than human. Métis scholar, Kim Anderson highlighted the ways in which persistent violent stereotypes narrativized against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are grounded within the state's quest for land and the imagery of Indigenous women aided in the convolution of land and women being "open for consumption" (2016, 81). As a result, the continued violence against the land is in direct correlation with the gendered realities of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. Throughout our Kitchen Table gatherings, land, water, and the more-than human continued to be brought into the conversation due to the spiritual innate connection and responsibilities we have to one another.

Ellen Gabriel in their text *When the Pine Needles Fall: Indigenous Acts of Resistance* confirmed the connection between resource extraction and systemic temporal violence (2024).

Gabriel recalls experiences in her activism and states, "People in power, mostly men, don't want to hear the voices of women. They tried to silence our voices, dismissing our concerns and experiences. The view that we should we deal with "domestic issues," like conjugal violence or murdered and missing Indigenous women, signifies that there remains much work to do in our communities" (2024, 84). Environmental injustice is not solely an issue brought to Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin because of the settler-state; Indigenous Nations themselves who have been infected with colonialism can also perpetuate these violences. Gabriel states, "Internalized capitalism and the unfettered free market economy that promotes and protects corporate rights over human rights and women's rights is the problem. Human rights, education, health care all get put on the back burner and our sacrificed for corporate greed and profit as Mother Earth is destroyed" (2024, 142).

Stories of Everyday Governance:

Kanehsatà:ke Resistance

Kanehsatà:ke is the Mohawk community that is often mislabeled through the name “Oka,” a framing that centres the nearby municipality rather than the community whose lands and jurisdiction were at issue (Cyca 2024).

The 1990 siege is best understood as a land defence and environmental conflict, not only a political confrontation (Milley 2019, 97–100). The immediate trigger was a municipal plan to expand an existing golf course and proceed with related development into an area known as the Pines, a forested space that included a Mohawk burial ground. The dispute therefore turned on the conversion of a culturally protected and ecologically significant area into recreational and commercial land use, with the burial ground and the surrounding pine forest treated as available for clearing, grading, and construction.

Environmental degradation in this setting is about more than the immediate clearing for one project. A golf course expansion would have meant cutting into the Pines and converting a forested area into a recreation site designed and maintained for a different purpose (Milley 2019, 97–100). The proposal treated the Pines as expendable, a space that could be reshaped and absorbed into a managed leisure landscape even though it held deep cultural significance and was understood as a place of responsibility and protection. In that sense, the conflict reveals how environmental decision-making can normalize dispossession. It also reflects a wider colonial pattern where land is catalogued and managed as property, and where Indigenous relationships to place, including obligations, rights, and histories, are pushed aside to make outside plans appear ordinary and inevitable (Milley 2019, 75). When that logic takes hold, forests and burial grounds

can be treated as just another “site,” and environmental damage can be presented as progress, even though it is tied to the erasure of Indigenous jurisdiction and meaning.

Indigenous women’s leadership was central to how land defence was communicated and sustained. Haudenosaunee culture is matrilineal, and Ellen Gabriel was chosen by the People of the Longhouse and then her community at Kanehsatà:ke to act as a spokesperson during the 1990 siege, bringing the defence of the Pines into public view and insisting that what was at stake was land, a burial ground, and community authority, not only a dispute over development (Anderson and Gabriel 2008, 52). Acknowledging Gabriel corrects the common framing that reduces the conflict to a confrontation between armed men and the state. Her role shows that women were central political actors, shaping how the community explained its responsibilities to the land and why environmental protection could not be separated from cultural survival and the protection of burial grounds for future generations.

This record highlights a sustained refusal to separate environmental protection from jurisdiction and collective wellbeing. The Pines were defended because they were land, forest, and burial ground, and because their conversion into a golf course expansion signaled the continuing treatment of Mohawk territory as a space available for development without consent (Milley 2019, 97–100). The environmental stakes were therefore not only about trees or a single project footprint. They were about what happens when planning institutions repeatedly assume Indigenous lands can absorb development pressures, and about how communities respond when they insist that some places are not expendable.

Digital Violence

Within the literature, there is overwhelming evidence that social media (aided by manipulative algorithms and then increasingly fragmented information ecosystems) has created a space where these stereotypes and dehumanizing narratives flourish (Callison and Young 2020; Spoonley and Morris 2023). Further, as studies of mis/disinformation attest, the proliferation of such narratives across this ever-shifting digital landscape not only spread the vitriol in a public domain but, perhaps, more importantly are utilized, foster, strengthen, mobilize and even radicalize the right (Beauvais and Stolle 2022; Spoonley and Morris 2023; Brown et al. 2026). Throughout the Kitchen Tables we held in September 2025, leaders shared that the vitriol of social media is ever-present and persistently an issue, as is demonstrated in the toxic campaigns of mis/disinformation during Manitoba's provincial election in 2023 (Brown et al. 2026), surging again during the fall of 2025 through campaigns against 3 Indigenous women members of Manitoba's legislative assembly. This situation is dire and is rooted in colonial stereotypes and gendered violence. While the proliferation of hate and the use of social media to mobilize the right is a major concern, our Kitchen Tables also affirmed how social media has been used as a vehicle to mobilize and to create and sustain the relational networks amongst leaders and between communities.

Leadership

This project has re-defined leadership beyond formal roles in institutional structures. Over the life of this project, each researcher took up our responsibilities to this resurgence-based work. L. B. Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishinaabeg) describes resurgence as

“undoing of the settler state” (L.B. Simpson and Brand, 2018). We have learnt that leadership is about mentoring, modelling, and responsibility in a range of settings and across them. At its core, leadership is about relationality (R. J. Kuokkanen 2019), and the relationships sustained between people, communities, and Nations. These are relationships that can, do, and must shift over time. Writing about Indigenous women working in university administration, Candace Brunette-Debassige explains that Indigenous leadership is “often constrained by the structurally embedded nature of ongoing settler colonialism within universities and nation-states” (2024, 59). It produces “embodied tensions and challenges” (Brunette-Debassige 2024, 64) for the Indigenous women who take up leadership roles.



Cambria Harris, a prominent advocate for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, addresses a crowd gathered outside Manitoba's legislative building in 2024. Image Credit: Jeff Stapleton, CBC.

In the context of resurgence, leadership is earned through care and shared responsibility — for self, for others, for community, for the lands, waters, more-than human relatives, for justice. It prioritizes creating worlds for Indigenous youth through deep care. Leadership transcends self-promotion; leaders build up those around them. Leaders are selected based on their skills, and how goals can be accomplished. This labour is expected and yet it is often unacknowledged. Leadership is working to share that labour. The role of MMIWG2S+ family members in leading calls for change, including for the establishment of the National Inquiry, makes clear one of the ways that family and connection is leadership.

Sometimes leaders are hidden in plain sight. Many people are unaware of the work that goes on that impacts their lives and the lives of people in the community. The common understanding is, “when we show up for the feast, everything is already done.” While we may not always see that Kitchen Tables are occurring, they have always been there. They are a part of consensus and relational governance. They are bridges to community and bring community ideas back to the center. Leadership is both the process of looking forward and looking back; so, the ways that leaders work to make things better for others also reflect/heal their own experiences. It is embodied in everyday actions embedded in care and responsibility.

Stories of Everyday Governance: Elsie Knott and Jean Folster

Elsie Knott and Jean Folster are remembered as being the “firsts,” but their lives point to something deeper than novelty. Both Knott and Folster stepped into elected leadership at moments when Canadian law and administration were trying to define who could govern under the Indian Act. Knott and Folster’s elections demonstrated their Nations already had strong expectations that women could lead.

Elsie Knott, an Ojibwe leader from Mud Lake Reserve, now Curve Lake First Nation, came of age in a system that tried to restrict First Nations’ governance and narrow women’s formal political roles. The 1951 amendment to the Indian Act mattered as it opened Band Council elections to women, with the return of women’s right to vote and to hold positions in office.

Artwork by Anna Heffernan, Curve Lake First Nation



ELSIE KNOTT
CANADA'S FIRST
ELECTED WOMAN CHIEF

Knott moved into leadership almost immediately after that change and was elected Chief in the early 1950s – a result that makes sense only if there was already Nation readiness for women’s leadership, and a willingness to choose it when the law finally permitted it (Voyageur 2011, 27; Women and Gender Equality Canada 2025).

Knott served multiple terms as Chief, and later returned to office from 1970 to 1976, a sign that the community continued to trust her judgement and direction over time. Knott’s leadership was grounded in practical community-building and cultural continuity. As Chief, she pursued improvements that affected daily life, including housing expansion and infrastructure needs, and she helped build community supports such as a daycare and a community centre.

Knott also worked to protect language and tradition, including helping establish an Anishinaabemowin language program at the local school and teaching language classes herself (Women and Gender Equality Canada 2025; Rose 2018; Voyageur 2011, 37). That combination, concrete improvements paired with cultural strengthening, helps explain why her leadership resonated across decades.

Jean Folster, a Cree leader from Norway House Cree Nation, followed a parallel path in Manitoba. She was the daughter of a trapper, raised and educated at Norway House, and spent years working at the Norway House Island Hospital. Her life was shaped by responsibility early on. She married Billy Folster in 1941, had eight children, and after he died in 1954, she supported the family through sewing.

She entered elected leadership through service, winning a council seat in 1967 and later serving as a social assistance officer, where she was close to the pressures families faced and the limitations of outside programs. In the late 1960s, she helped start the first local child and

family services agency in a First Nations community, building a community-based structure for support rather than relying on distant decision makers.

In 1971, Folster was the only woman candidate among four candidates for Chief. She was elected, becoming the first female chief in Manitoba, and served until 1975. She also served as a provincial magistrate, hearing cases at Norway House and Cross Lake. Folster became known for insisting on fairness even when the accused were people she knew. Folster described leadership as demanding and constant, rooted in responding to community needs, managing pressures from many directions, and making decisions that affected people’s everyday lives (Lowery 1981, 57–60; Graham and Goldsborough 2026).



Jean Folster, 1975, MM157

Together, Knott and Folster show how quickly First Nation women could move into elected leadership once settler-state imposed barriers shifted, and how durable leadership could be when it was built on community service, credibility, and a clear commitment to strengthening community life.

Previous Reports: Where Justice Goes to Die

Canada and the provinces have commissioned countless reports that determine the breadth of colonialism's violent, racist, and gendered impact on Indigenous Nations. This was explicitly raised in Manitoba's 1991 Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI). The "Stolen Sisters" report states, "At the heart of the problem is the belief that, fundamentally, justice authorities do not understand and do not wish to understand, the unique issues facing [Indigenous] women" (1991, 480).

Chronologically, the literature can be distinguished along some of the major inquiries, reports, and temporalities. For example, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), the Stolen Sisters Report by Amnesty International (2004), and the Native Women's Association Canada (NWAC) Sisters in Spirit

project (de-funded in 2010) (2009, 2010) and the final report "Reclaiming Power and Place: the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls" (2019b).

We might see these documents as places where justice goes to die. We might also see them as places where justice goes to rest, and can be revived as part of a process of rematriation. When there is no implementation of report recommendations that echo the voices, teachings, and knowledges of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin, it allows colonial violence to continue with impunity (Kolopenuk 2024). Kolopenuk states, "institutional reconciliation efforts have typically been at the exclusion of the Calls for Justice" (2024, 5). We have seen resistance and resurgence movements during the Kanehsatà:ke siege (1990), Idle No More (2012), post-Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the National Inquiry (2019).

The work of Indigenous women has not receded, but changed (Anderson 2009; L. B. Simpson 2014; A. Simpson 2016). It has always been Indigenous women and the families of MMIWG2S+ who advocated and fought for the rights of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin (Monture-Angus 1995; A. Simpson 2016; Starblanket 2024a; Gabriel 2024; P. D. Palmater 2020; Hamilton and Sinclair 1991a).

"...we have all the reports and commissions that tell the story of colonialism and genocide. We have hundreds if not thousands of recommendations which outline the frameworks need for social change...it's another example of the systemic racism and gender discrimination that Indigenous women's advocacy has faced since the early days of contesting the inequalities in the Indian Act in the early 1970s. It's frustrating because our voices aren't respected...Research and reports alone have not brought about the changes we need, even though they are evidence based. These reports must be grounded in efforts to teach the truth about Canada's genocidal history against Indigenous Peoples – not just a footnote in a history book"

- Ellen Gabriel (2024, 143).



Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI)

The AJI was called by the province of Manitoba in 1988 in response to the deaths of Helen Betty Osborne (1971) and J.J. Harper (1988). The AJI was led by newly appointed Annishinaabeg judge, the late Murray Sinclair (1951-2024) and settler judge, the late Alvin Hamilton (1926-2014). The Inquiry wrapped up in 1989 and issued a final report (1991) that still holds power today. Indigenous women were crucial to the work of the AJI as staff members and also as community members who provided some of the more than 1,000 presentations to the Commission.

The AJI brought new attention to what would later be known in the 2000s as MMIWG2S+, especially in the Volume devoted to the murder of Helen Betty Osborne (1991c). The AJI also called attention to the over-incarceration of Indigenous women. In its chapter titled Aboriginal Women, the Final Report explained:

Aboriginal women and their children suffer tremendously as victims in contemporary Canadian society. They are the victims of racism, of sexism, and of unconscionable levels of domestic violence. The justice system has done little to protect them from any of these assaults. At the same time, Aboriginal women have an even higher rate of over-representation in the prison system than Aboriginal men. In community after community, Aboriginal women brought these disturbing facts to our attention. We believe the plight of Aboriginal women and their children must be a priority for any changes in the justice system. In addition, we believe that changes must be based on the proposals that Aboriginal women presented to us throughout our Inquiry (1991a, 475).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was called in 2008 and issued its final report in 2015. The final report detailed 94 Calls to Action, including number 41, which spoke directly about Indigenous women and girls: “We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal organizations, to appoint a public inquiry into the causes of, and remedies for, the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls. The inquiry’s mandate would include: an investigation into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls, and ii. Links to the intergenerational legacy of residential schools” (2015).

This Call to Action is considered completed owing to the work of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019c).

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

In 2016, the long-called for National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls commenced. Over 2,000 families, survivors, and people were involved in the truth hearing process (2019d). Their stories, knowledge, and strength shaped the inquiry and their voices informed 231 Calls for Justice (National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019). The National Inquiry requires that all governments are transforming the violent structures of colonialism that sustain gendered dispossession through implementing every call.



Our responsibility to this work, flows from Call for Justice 1.4, which is: “to take urgent and special measures to ensure that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are represented in governance and that their political rights are respected and upheld” (National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019). This re-port takes up the work to redefine leadership and governance, and exemplify the work that Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are doing to protect their human rights. As a result, this Final Report necessitates policy recommendations to all levels of government, including Indigenous governance to include Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin in all decision-making processes and immediately halt the state-sponsored genocide.

The Calls for Justice and the National Inquiry’s final report houses the heart knowledge of over 2,000 people who shared what needs to change for the safe future of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin (2019c; 2019; 2019a). As of June 2025, only two Calls for Justice have been completed, 138 are in action, and 82 are pending to begin (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada 2026).



Legal Orders and Human Rights Mechanisms

The published literature reveals the fallacy of equality under the law for Indigenous women (Monture-Angus 1995; Suzack 2010; McCallum and Klassen 2017). Cheryl Suzack (Anishinaabe) builds upon Monture-Angus' analysis of the rule of law (1995) and affirms that discrimination based on gender does not reflect the true nature of Indigenous women's realities and often legal narratives legitimize settler-state stereotypes and myths about Indigenous women (2010). It is affirmed we must bring the humanity of Indigenous women into the conversation. Suzack states, "Affective listening is necessary to conceptualize the human situations represented by Aboriginal women's stories" (2010, 136). The law clearly demonstrates that it is not made for everyone (Monture-Angus 1995; Eberts 2014). This is extraordinarily important because of the ways in which Indigenous women are viewed as legal nullities enforced through legal institutions and policy because of the removal of humanity and citizenship fuelled through stereotypes (Eberts 2014, 153).

Building upon this human rights framing is the work of Brenda Gunn (Métis). In "Bringing a Gendered Lens to Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," (2023) Gunn asserts the requirements for gendered analyses to apply to laws and human rights conventions that would align with the notion of gender-neutrality discussed by others (Monture-Angus 1995; Snyder 2018; J. A. Green and Eberts 2017). Settler scholar Sean Carleton states, "Canadians follow the "the law" as if it's ironclad and natural rather than an imposed tool of colonialism" (2024, 173). Building upon this, Ellen Gabriel states, "Colonial laws don't recognize or respect the human rights to self-determination of the First

Peoples of Turtle Island...It's an imbalanced relationship with the colonizer holding all the cards and making all the rules" (2024, 173). Gabriel emphasizes that Canada does not recognize or affirm the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. Requiring gendered analysis to understand the gendered experiences of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse kin must be a requisite proceeding forward with legislation or policy.

International Human Rights Mechanisms

In recent decades, international human rights law has evolved to recognize the specific experiences and rights of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. Through a human rights framework, treaty bodies, case decisions, and monitoring mechanisms work to examine and scrutinize Canada's treatment of Indigenous people. These instruments have focused on issues including discrimination in the Indian Act, failures in protecting Indigenous women from violence, and the need to uphold collective rights to land and self-determination.

One of the most significant developments in international law is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNDRIP 2007). Canada initially opposed the UNDRIP when it was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007. It was not until 2016 that Canada changed its position and endorsed the Declaration. In 2021, the Canadian Parliament passed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, confirming the legal force of the UNDRIP in Canadian law and committing the federal government to aligning its laws and policies with its provisions. It affirms that all rights apply equally

to Indigenous Peoples and Article 22 specifically calls on states to ensure that Indigenous women and children are fully protected from violence and discrimination. At the provincial level, British Columbia passed its own legislation in 2019 to implement the Declaration, becoming the first province in Canada to do so.

Canada is also party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which requires states eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, including those rooted in intersectional forms of inequality. In 2022, the CEDAW Committee adopted General Recommendation No.39 on the rights of Indigenous women and girls. The recommendation recognizes Indigenous women and girls experience systemic and overlapping forms of discrimination because of their gender, Indigenous identity, poverty, and exclusion from political power. It outlines the obligations of states to ensure Indigenous women's access to land, education, health care, justice, and participation in public life. It also calls for culturally-appropriate services and policies that reflect the lived realities of Indigenous women and girls and respect their right to self-determination.

Two cases brought before the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) have addressed discrimination against Indigenous women in Canada. The first is the case of *Lovelace v. Canada* (*Lovelace v. Canada* CCPR/C/13/D/24/1977 1981). Sandra Lovelace is a Maliseet woman, who under the Indian Act lost her legal status after marrying a non-First Nations man. As a result, she was no longer allowed to live in her home community. In 1981, the HRC found that Canada had violated her rights under Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects the rights of minorities to enjoy their culture in community with others. The de-

cision led to reforms in the Indian Act, but did not fully eliminate sex-based discrimination in the law.

The second major case is *Mclvor v. Canada* (*Mclvor and Grismer v. Canada* CCPR/C/124/D/2020/2010, n.d.). Sharon Mclvor and her son Jacob Grismer challenged the continuing discrimination in the Indian Act that limited the ability of Indigenous women to pass legal status to their descendants in the same way that First Nations men could. In 2018, the HRC ruled that Canada had violated Articles 3 and 26 of the ICCPR, which guarantee equality between men and women and prohibit discrimination. The Committee found that the amended legislation continued to impose unjustified distinctions based on sex and called on Canada to provide effective remedies and full legal equality. Although Canada made further changes to the law, forms of discrimination remain.

In addition to individual cases, Canada has been the subject of a formal inquiry under the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW. In 2015, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women released its Report of Inquiry concerning Canada (2015). This inquiry was launched after Indigenous organizations submitted evidence that the state had failed to prevent violence against Indigenous women and girls, failed to investigate disappearances and murders, and failed to address the root causes of these harms. The Committee found that Canada had committed grave and systematic violations of CEDAW (2015). It noted that policing and justice systems often failed to take cases seriously and that many Indigenous families were left without answers or accountability. The report recommended the development of a coordinated national action plan, major reforms in police accountability, and the full inclusion of Indigenous women in the design of programs and policies.

In its 2024 Concluding Observations, the Committee reiterated serious concerns about Canada's ongoing failure to fully eliminate gender-based discrimination in the Indian Act, highlighting provisions that still restrict First Nations women's ability to transmit status to their descendants and calling for legislative amendments, status reinstatement, and improved registration processes (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 2024). It expressed alarm at the persistently high levels of gender-based violence, including femicide, affecting Indigenous women and girls and urged Canada to implement the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, strengthen investigations and prosecutions, and support prevention and protection measures for Indigenous women. The Committee criticized Canada's slow progress in implementing the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice and its failure to fully act on the Committee's earlier inquiry recommendations. It also called for the government to ensure the meaningful participation of Indigenous women's organizations in policymaking and to apply intersectional analysis across all measures. Overall, Canada must not only pursue legal reforms but also address the deep-rooted societal inequalities that continue to endanger Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin.

These cases, inquiries, and treaties create an extensive and growing framework for understanding Canada's international human rights obligations. This framework requires governments to initiate legal change, pursue systemic transformation, and centre Indigenous voices in all areas of decision-making. The experiences of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin will continue to serve as a critical measure of the country's progress toward fulfilling its human rights commitments.

Duty to Consult

Through the UNDRIP Action Plan, the government committed to co-developing meaningful consultation. Meaningful consultation and engagement must not be limited to recognized Indigenous government organizations but must also include Indigenous grassroots organizations who are on the ground taking care of their relations. To represent the Honour of the Crown, consultation must move beyond national organizations and governments. The duty must encompass meaningful inclusion of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin, including in urban spaces. Consultation must be accomplished through rights holders and resist tokenism. These leaders must be sitting around decision making tables. Collaborative decision-making has the capacity to transform relationships between all levels of government, industry, and Indigenous leaders, to a functional, relational, and meaningful partnership.

Homemakers' Clubs

An example of Indigenous women's mobilization is the federally funded Indian Homemakers' Clubs. In 1937, the first Homemakers' Club was established to teach women how to sew, knit, cook, and take care of children. However, as women gathered, these clubs became active sites of knowledge sharing and production, and ultimately resistance. Indigenous women's leadership operated within these spaces. Historian Sarah Nickel documents how the clubs were able to facilitate this resistance unwatched whereas women were often under surveillance when gathering in other contexts (2025). The Clubs created space to gather without any questions asked; no one was interested in women's housekeeping business. This political mobilization was able to operate unseen by the state and patriarchal systems.

By 1956, there were over two hundred Homemakers' Clubs in which leaders were fundraising for their Nations, advocating, supporting, and mobilizing through collective conversations to recognize what needs to change within the Nation. These Clubs built economies, collectives, and discussed the importance of Indigenous politics (McCallum and Klassen 2017, 224). They kept stories and teachings alive, were able to share with one another and younger generations, and blurred modern and traditional practices (McCallum and Klassen 2017, 224). The Clubs were able to fill gaps when the federal government ignored and failed their relatives. Homemakers' Club conventions allowed women to gather, and they became spaces of Indigenous internationalism. Women

were able to share information, discuss issues, and challenges in spaces where they determined the issues their Nations were facing were not isolated but in fact systemic (Nickel 2025). Conventions facilitated the disbursement of information and news where women could travel back with stories, strategies, and tools to help their Nations.

As the funding for these clubs ended, many transitioned into women's political activism groups which were open to all Indigenous women as they moved away from federal funding and band politics (Nickel 2025). Homemakers' Clubs had additional widespread political effects: they raised funds to advocate against the White Paper (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 1969) and provided the structure that the National Indian Brotherhood and Native



British Columbia Indian Homemakers Association display at 1971 P.N.E. International Bazaar. City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 180-6851.

Women's Association of Canada followed. Additionally, many leaders who were elected to Band Council governance had a history of running or setting up Homemakers' Clubs (McCallum and Klassen 2017, 224).

The Indian Homemakers' Clubs can be understood as community-based governance practices that align with international legal commitments in terms of Indigenous participation, equality, and cultural survival. In the Homemakers' Club system, women organized mutual aid and community infrastructure through practical projects, and they also built leadership capacity inside a framework that was closely supervised by Indian Affairs. Nickel describes the clubs as contradictory spaces, shaped by Euro-Canadian domestic training, while also being spaces that cultivated women's leadership, rights, and cultural strength (2025, 387).

Clubs took on social welfare functions that officials treated as essential, and the unpaid labour of women effectively filled service gaps on reserve. Over time, many women pushed beyond a narrow "stove and sewing machine" mandate and used the organizing networks they had built to pursue policy change, including lobbying for better reserve conditions, education, and health care.

Political Resistance and the Work of Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, and Gender-Diverse Kin

Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin have always resisted state-sponsored genocide through political mobilization. This resistance and political mobilization are strategic; they operate within and outside of the settler-state. This trajectory maps directly onto international norms of political participation and a human-rights based approach whereby those most directly affect-

ed by a human rights failure are to be central in planning and operationalizing a response (Human Rights Watch 2019). UNDRIP affirms Indigenous Peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters affecting their rights through representatives chosen in accordance with their own procedures, and to maintain and develop their own decision-making institutions. ICCPR Article 25 similarly protects the right of every citizen to take part in public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. The link is clearest at the community level: Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders are building the forums, skills, and collective capacity that make participation real, especially where state structures had attempted to narrow Indigenous women's public roles and treat community decision-making as an administrative extension of Federal control.

Out Kitchen Table gatherings identify governance as a relational practice, carried through visiting, food, storytelling, and language work. One Métis community initiative describes a Kitchen Table practice grounded in visiting protocols, where regular gatherings became the setting for decisions about language re-vitalization, with an emphasis on community-led ethics and collective responsibility (Gaudet and Rancourt 2024, 177–78). These gatherings function as decision-making institutions in everyday form, which is exactly what UNDRIP's participation protections are meant to safe-guard. The same instrument affirms language rights, including the right to revitalize, use, develop, and transmit Indigenous languages and oral traditions to future generations, and to establish education and media in Indigenous languages. That is the legal vocabulary for what Kitchen Table language work accomplishes; it protects language as a practice maintained

through community authority and collective decision-making.

International women's rights instruments also help name what is happening in these spaces without flattening them into "informal" work. CEDAW's rural women provision requires measures to eliminate discrimination so women can participate in development planning at all levels and benefit from development, including access to health and social supports. Nickel's analysis emphasizes continuity between home and community organizing, where domestic spaces become sites of political work tied to kinship responsibilities and doing what needed to be done (2025). Her account also captures the behind-the-scenes labour of women staying up all night at each other's houses working through grant applications while children slept nearby, showing that rights claims are operationalized through collective care and administrative skill, not only through formal office holding (Nickel 2025).

UNDRIP likewise directs states to pay particular attention to Indigenous women and to ensure protection against violence and discrimination. Reading Kitchen Table governance and Homemakers' Clubs through human rights instruments makes the intersection clear. These practices are not peripheral to rights. They are mechanisms through which Indigenous women have asserted participation, safeguarded culture, and pursued equality on their own terms. We can also see this in movements led by Indigenous women, including the ongoing struggle around Indian Status for women, Idle No More, and the Red Dress Alert Project.

Bill C-31: The Struggle for Indian Status for First Nations Women

Throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s Indigenous women organized and worked locally, nationally, and internationally to challenge the profound sexism and patriarchy of laws govern-

ing who could claim rights as a "status Indian." In 1967, Mary Two-Axe Early, Nellie Carlson, and Kathleen Steinhauer formed Indian Rights for Indian Women, a grassroots organization pressing for change. In 1973, Yvonne Bedard and Jannette Corbiere Lavell brought the issue of women, marriage, and status to Canada's supreme court. In 1981, Wolastoqiyik Sandra Lovelace Nicholas successfully petitioned the United Nation Human Rights Committee, explaining that the Indian Act violated international law.

In 1985, the Indian Act was amended with the passage of Bill C-31, allowing women and their children who had lost status through marriage to regain it (Indigenous Foundations 2009). This represented a major victory for Indigenous women's activism across generations. Indigenous women, many of whom continue to raise issues with the gendered effects of the Indian Act and call for further changes. As Mi'kmaq lawyer and professor Pamela Palmater explains, "40 years after Parliament promised to end sex discrimination in the Indian Act and after more than 18 ministers of Indian Affairs, First Nations women are still fighting for equality" (2025).

Idle No More

Idle No More refers to the Indigenous resurgence and resistance movement that was sparked in 2012-3, or "the winter we danced" (Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014). The Kino-nda-niimi Collective began with four Saskatchewan women, three First Nations and one settler: Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, Jessica Gordon, and Sheelah McLean. They began to organize communities through social media and "teach in's" to challenge an omnibus bill proposed by the conservative federal government. Idle No More grew into a wider, national and international movement calling for Indigenous sovereignty and environmental

justice and drawing on practices like round dances and beadwork. Idle No More was and remains a social movement with no formal leader. It remained associated with and led by Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people, including Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence, Cree scholar and Two-Spirit leader Dr. Alex Wilson, Métis artist Christi Belcourt, and Cree lawyer Tanya Kappo.

Red Dress Alert Project

In 2025, Giganawenimaanaanig began work engaging with community in Manitoba to establish a Red Dress Alert system. Both the province of Manitoba and the federal government committed to the system that would, “promote the security and safety of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ persons and provide impacted families and communities with the tools, support, and justice they deserve” (Giganawenimaanaanig 2025, 1). The goal of the Red Dress Alert is a “proposed alert system will quickly mobilize police and other agencies, Indigenous governments and organizations, service providers, and the general public in the critical hours and days after a community or family member is reported missing” (Giganawenimaanaanig 2025). Centering relationality, and trust, Giganawenimaanaanig – Manitoba’s MMIWG2S+ Implementation Committee – heard from community members and Nations to determine how this system will be most useful and responsive. The Red Dress Alert honours Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin, and demonstrates the agency and leadership exercised to take care of relatives. Having systems and structures designed by and for Indigenous people, it becomes a relational tool to protect our relatives.



Data Sovereignty

Data and data sovereignty is paramount to Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin's inclusion in governance and leadership. Data generates evidence. Indigenous grassroots organizations must be included in data tables at the university, as well as at provincial and federal levels, such as the Manitoba Population Research Data Repository (Manitoba Centre for Health Policy) or RITHIM (Research Manitoba). Often, Indigenous organizations are not included in these discussions because they are not representative of settler-state approved governments (e.g., Band Councils, Assembly of First Nations, Manitoba Métis Federation). However, as this report makes clear, this is not an accurate representation of leaders and governance.

Organizational inclusion must go beyond information sharing at the end of a project. Questions to frame research projects may include:

- Who is represented in this data?
- Who are the users of this data?
- Who benefits from the data?
- Who should be in control of the research design?

Stories of Everyday Governance: Neechi Foods and Neechi Commons

The 1980s and 90s witnessed a wave of community development in Winnipeg's north end, much of it spearheaded by Indigenous women. This included Neechi Foods Co-Op, which began in a small store on Dufferin Street in 1990. Led by Louise Champagne, Neechi Foods sold groceries, including traditional Indigenous foodstuffs, and locally-made moccasins, and refused to sell tobacco or lotteries (Thunder and Intertas 2020). In 2013, the operation moved to Main Street and opened Neechi Commons, which included a full-service grocery store, a restaurant, a book and craft store. Neechi Commons ceased operations in 2018, but the work of Champagne, described as “the Mother of Indigenous Social Enterprise within Winnipeg's inner city,” is an important example of Indigenous women's leadership in this city (Chartrand 2020).



Theresa Kakegamic and Kanina Kakegamic (Sandy Lake First Nation) at Neechi Foods Community Store.

Considerations of questions of ownership, users, benefits, and control must account for Indigenous realities, and be used to facilitate Indigenous data sovereignty. This means that Indigenous data must be gathered to represent Indigenous-identified needs, issues, and concerns; and those represented in/through data must be empowered to access and manage their/our own data. Research processes must therefore begin with respectful and meaningful conversations to identify research needs; they must follow appropriate protocols and ensure research needs are met in accordance with Indigenous sovereignty throughout the entirety of any given project.

Statistical and other research data garnered through these respectful and sovereignty-oriented methods can facilitate and support Indigenous leaders' participation in funding decisions and apparatuses that affect their Nations and communities. Without accurate, appropriately-compiled data, Indigenous leaders and issues are often sidelined, obfuscated, and not funded. Data hubs and partnerships must be developed via relational approaches so that we may begin discussions on how we can ensure data sovereignty is honoured and achieved. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse organizations would be ideal spaces for such work to take place — indeed some women's groups have already begun this work. However, there is a persistent lack of sufficient funding and resources within Indigenous women's organizations (Grozelle 2023). These are legacies of early colonial instruments, such as residential schools and the Indian Act (Eberts 2014), and can be traced to the settler-state government's unwillingness to fund organizations and initiatives that would fight against patriarchal, colonial policy that excludes women.

Systems and Institutions

The settler-state does not empower systems and institutions that could dismantle their illusion of sovereignty. Building from this, it is apparent the settler-state also does not include Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin at decision-making tables around data collection and management, or the financial resources often connected for the same reasons. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin threaten patriarchal settler-colonialism's fragile sovereignty because of the ways in which they embody and represent working and workable alternative political orders and systems (Eberts 2014). Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin have recorded and kept stories in their own relational networks, as a result, they have identified decisions made by governments and third-party stakeholders that have perpetuated harm.



Policy Implications and Recommendations

- 1.** All policies and legislation proposed and written by all levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments must include specific language to ensure they are gender-inclusive.
- 2.** Governments must adhere to UNDRIP standard of full and effective participation when consulting with Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin to develop functional, relational, and meaningful funding mechanisms. When determining future funding and the success of programs, evaluative mechanisms must transition from solely focusing on programming costs to also acknowledging non-monetary Indigenous community-identified values and outcomes. Adhering to the Honour of the Crown, all governments must consult with Indigenous, women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin who are rights holders outside of regulatory mechanisms and governments. To further research on the Honour of the Crown, and good governance, a full report must be researched and completed at the policy level to ensure this consultation requirement is met.
- 3.** All levels of state government must return to the Independent Special Interlocutor's Final Report (2024), Calls for Justice from the MMIWG2S+ Inquiry (2019), Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (1999), and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). These reports have not been widely engaged with as there has been little implementation of their recommendations. These reports must be effectively used, and the policy recommendations implemented in a timely manner to demonstrate state commitment to respect and protect Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. A failure to acknowledge this past and ongoing leadership and governance of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse kin continues to promote the genocide of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse kin.
- 4.** Data do not account for enmeshed structures of oppression and privilege and the lived realities for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. Indigenous Feminist methods of critical inquiry as well as a justice lens must be used to address human rights and inequity when designing and re-designing municipal and provincial programs and applying for grants. All levels of state government must be required to demonstrate meaningful consultation and engagement through a transparent decision-making process and inclusive data structure.

5. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse peoples' governance and leadership must be recognized outside of settler state structures and institutions of governance. This includes the leadership and governance involved in frontline service delivery, community organizing, and Kitchen Tables. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin persistently work in a myriad of areas to shape, intervene in, and make policy recommendations to Indigenous and state governments and organizations. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin take up many leadership responsibilities regardless of their official job descriptions or positions. The inclusion of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin through the Duty to Consult and broader engagement processes must reject the consistent tokenism, disappearance and silencing of these voices. All levels of government and third-party stakeholders must ensure equitable inclusion and be liable under a labour relation clause to ensure the Duty to Consult and any engagement respectfully and meaningfully include Indigenous women, girls Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. This will require expanding consultation and engagement activities beyond traditional Indigenous governments and representative bodies and demonstrating the development and fostering of meaningful equitable relationships. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin have historically and contemporarily been dispossessed from Canadian Human Rights legislation and their respect, dignity, and protections often seen as existing outside of the law. Human rights mechanisms must be identified (e.g., United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights) and their protections accepted and implemented within municipal, provincial, territorial and federal governments to ensure the respect, dignity, protection, safety and security of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. Call 1.1 (National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019) must be implemented in full without exception.

6. All municipal, provincial, and territorial governments must develop accountability mechanisms to protect the human rights of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin in accordance to Calls for Justice 1.10 and 1.7 (National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019) within an agreed upon time frame, following meaningful consultations with Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin.



Further Research

To write this report, each team member picked up responsibilities throughout our collaborative visits, Kitchen Table engagements, and time spent caring for relatives for whom this report is meant for. Built into this report are accountability measures we followed to ensure this report is not “where justice goes to die.” This report is a living document sharing the literature and voices of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders. Through it, we work to decolonize and (re)define leadership and governance; we also seek to humanize this work and remember the spirits of these leaders who are loved, and who must be cared for and protected.

We recognize that there are many gaps that our research project could not address. We need more research that takes a distinction-based approach, including of Inuit. We do not know enough about the specific experiences of Indigenous girls and youth, about Indiqueer and Two-Spirit people.

Colonial violence is gendered, permeating every sphere of the settler-state, and seeping into Indigenous Nations. Patriarchy continues to effect Indigenous leadership (Monture-Angus 1995; J. A. Green 2001; Ladner 2009; Huhndorf and Suzack 2010; Knott 2018; Eberts 2014; P. D. Palmater 2020; Bourgeois 2024). For Indigenous futures to be safe and healthy, self-determination and governance must recognize and remediate gender violence (J. Green 1993; Monture-Angus 1995; R. Kuokkanen 2012). This report has identified that the leadership of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin has always existed and endures in the face of settler-colonialism and gendered violence. Their leadership exists, is meaningful, and has saved the lives of their relations both in and outside of official leadership and governance capacities.

Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability mechanisms must be built into systems, structures, and policies to ensure Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin’s human rights are protected. We thus call for sustained funding and Indigenous-led mechanisms to monitor the implementation of both Calls to Action and Calls for Justice. This monitoring can begin with an annual re-visiting and measuring progress toward addressing the Inquiry’s Final Report and the Calls for Justice and the TRC’s Calls to Action. Further mechanisms must recognize the importance of addressing material inequities, the indivisibility of rights, and the lack of institutional bodies for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin to turn to when their economic, social, and cultural rights are violated. There are deep commitments from this team to protect and honour this report and the knowledge housed within it. As a result, the above policy recommendations will be subject to annual reviews to ensure they are implemented by the responsible parties.

During the first year that this report is published, the team who has worked on this project has committed to doing presentations to disseminate the knowledge shared with us through various avenues including social media. This report will be published as a plain language version and in other languages to work towards accessibility and broad reach.



Conclusion

Our project is titled “Those Who Hold Everything: The Rematriation of Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, and Gender-Diverse People’s Human Rights and the Obligations of All Governments.” The title of this project has its origins in powerful words spoken by Grandmother (Denima) Thelma Morisseau, who helped guide this project.

Kitchen Tables are political spaces of resurgence and protection, where we come together, feed each other, and strategize. These are political relationships that have always been there, and it is at these tables that we come together to try to stop a genocide and hold each other up. Leadership is a place where rage and loss can become hope and love (Flowers 2015). Regardless of the realities Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are experiencing, they are sitting down, pouring tea, and doing the work to protect their Nations. Their leadership is persistent, and they continue to enter spaces that are not welcoming in order to make much-needed change. Each visible gain represents decades of advocacy and organizing bound by loss, rage, hope, and love. The rights of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin exist. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders have worked and continue to work to ensure their enactment now and into the future.

This work has been completed intentionally; we built relationships to guide this work, and to breathe life into it. The work shared in this report is not an abstract concept; we are constantly immersed in the ways patriarchy is lived and experienced in our daily lives. This was demonstrated through the leaders who sat with us around kitchen tables and the continued generosity of all the Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin who continue to teach and share knowledge. Transnational relations operate in and through this generosity. Kitchen Tables foster relationality and political resurgence and operate just about anywhere tea can be poured. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin make sure their kin are around these tables. And regardless of where they come to these tables, the tables build protective structures and practices that feed and nurture the spirits around the table and beyond. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin have built intergenerational support through their strength across tables. Here/there they/we work to stop a genocide, renew knowledges, and prepare for, politicize, and ground future generations.

The Kitchen Table is always there, a seat always open, and the tea can always be made.



Annex A: Past Reports

The purpose of this annex is to provide information to Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments.

There is an overwhelming amount of testimony, story, policy recommendations, and responsibilities for governments to hear, listen, and implement through previous reports and inquiries. This knowledge is often forgotten, ignored, and dismissed. This Annex provides a list of 4 critical reports and inquiries that can be used by leaders when they go to court, submit claims, and hold Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments accountable. The project team listed on the table of contents is in your corner, we support your leadership.

For a full list of resources utilized and found throughout the course of this project, please visit our public Zotero library. These sources can be used in grant writing, creating chronologies, and demonstrating expansive research gathered to support your arguments and claims.

Calling For Justice Zotero Library: <https://chrr.info/resource/calling-for-justice-zotero-library/>

Reports

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry examines Indigenous People and the Justice System within the Province of Manitoba, with a dedicated chapter to Indigenous women's experiences along with recommendations to end systemic injustices:

Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission. 1991. *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba. Volume 1: The Justice System and Aboriginal People*. Province of Manitoba. <https://ajic.mb.ca/volumel/toc.html>

The Amnesty International Report articulates Canada role in ensuring the safety of Indigenous women, along with policy and government action recommendations to end discrimination in acts of violence against Indigenous women:

Amnesty International. 2004. *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada*. AMR 20/003/2004. Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr20/003/2004/en/>

The National Inquiry's Final Report documents the cause and impact of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit, with 231 specific Calls For Justice to guide the Canadians government, agencies, and institutions toward ending systemic violence:

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. 2019. *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>.

Sister in Spirit Initiative's second edition report is dedicated to families' perspective, and stories of Missing and/or Murdered Indigenous Women along with policy recommendations to provide justice for Indigenous women, girls, and their families:

Native Women's Association of Canada. 2009. *Voices of Our Sisters in Spirit: A Report to Families and Communities*. Second Edition. Native Women's Association of Canada.

https://nwac-afac.ca/assets-knowledge-centre/2009_Voices_of_Our_SIS_A_Report_to_Families_and_Communities.pdf



Annex B: Human Rights Mechanisms

The United Nations human rights agency describes human rights as inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to human rights without discrimination and these rights are interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.)

International human rights law, despite its complex and at times controversial history, can serve as a tool for mobilization and social change (Neve 2025). The human rights framework can and has been used as a tool to advocate for human rights. The information below, which is not exhaustive, provides some of the important legal mechanisms that can be used to engage government as ‘duty-bearers’ of rights in relationship to ‘rights holders.’

The **International Bill of Human Rights** includes the following human rights Covenants and Declaration:

United Nations. 1948. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” General Assembly Resolution 217 A. United Nations, December 10. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

United Nations. 1966a. “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.” General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI). United Nations, December 16. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

United Nations. 1966b. “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.” General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI). United Nations, December 16. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

Canada has ratified these Covenants, making them legally binding Treaties, with specific obligations as a result, including regular compliance reports to the United Nations.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the most important Declaration defining Indigenous Rights at the international level. While Declarations do not have the same legally binding power of a Covenant, they remain significant as reflecting the collective views of member nations. Ratification by states signals that they will be bound by those provisions.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/RES/61/295 (2007). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples>

In 2021, the Canadian Parliament passed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, confirming the legal force of the Declaration in Canadian law and committing the federal government to aligning its laws and policies with its provisions. It affirms that all rights apply equally to Indigenous people.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, sc 2021, c 14 (2021). <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/about-afpos.html>

The United Nations Special Rapporteur provides information and guiding principles on internally displaced people (IDP), articulating the Government's role when IDP are displaced. Governments have a responsibility in the protection and investment in IDP's safety and rights. Framing the historical and ongoing displacement of Indigenous peoples in Canada through the lens of the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement may offer an opportunity to advocate for rights and protections.

United Nations. 2024. "*Special Rapporteur on Internally Displaced Persons.*" About Internally Displaced Persons. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-internally-displaced-persons/about-internally-displaced-persons>

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both ratified by the Canadian state, with relevance for advocacy work for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender diverse people.

United Nations. 1979. "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women." United Nations General Assembly Resolution 34/180. December 18. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

United Nations. 1989. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." General Assembly Resolution 44/25. United Nations, November 20. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

Annex C:

Knowledge Mobilization Activities

Our project and its knowledge mobilization activities is grounded in relationality. We have committed to sharing the project's findings to diverse audiences, using a variety of formats. We will share this work through the team's relational networks.

1. Between September 2025 and April 2026, a series of four Kitchen Table Gatherings took place. The final gathering was an opportunity for the research team to present the final report with Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders.
2. In November 2025, members of our team presented the preliminary themes of our project to a group of 30 students in Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Manitoba.
3. In February 2026, as we working on synthesizing the literature, we used this work to complete a submission to United Nations' 63rd Session of the Human Rights Council: Historical and Contemporary Forms of Violations against Indigenous Women and Girls' Reproductive Health and Rights (see Annex D).
4. In February 2026, our team hosted Dr. Gina Starblanket for a public event and a smaller working group session to discuss relational Indigenous Feminist practices.



Dr. Gina Starblanket with project team members and early career researchers at the University of Manitoba, February 27, 2026.

5. Our final report and Kitchen Table report will be available on the virtual Resource Hub of the Centre for Human Rights Research.
6. To engage with and support students and researchers, including community-based researchers, we will publish access to our full Zotero library on the virtual Resource Hub of the Centre for Human Rights Research.
7. We have plans to translate the final report into different languages.
8. To generate public awareness, following completion of the project's reports, we will create a social media campaign to share the projects findings.
9. In May 2026, our team will present our project's findings at the SSHRC Knowledge Mobilization Forum.
10. In May 2026, our project will support an event in honour of Red Dress Day, hosted by the Centre for Human Rights Research at the University of Manitoba.





Annex D: CHRR Report to the 63rd Session of the Human Rights Council

See: [CHRR Report to the 63rd Session of the Human Rights Council_Feb 2026.pdf](#)

**Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Report to the 63rd Session of the Human Rights Council: Historical and Contemporary Forms of Violations against Indigenous Women and Girls' Reproductive Health and Rights
February 20, 2026**

This submission, from the Centre for Human Rights Research at the University of Manitoba, links historical and contemporary harms against Indigenous Women and Girls' Reproductive Health and Rights to the gendered and racialized logics of settler colonialism, including displacement from land and family structures in ways that disrupt autonomy, agency, and safety. We adopt the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girl's conclusion that this sustained pattern of racial and gendered violence amounts to an ongoing genocide against Indigenous women, girls, Two- Spirit, and gender diverse peoples. At the same time, we emphasize that Indigenous women and gender diverse peoples have consistently resisted these harms and have worked to protect their families, communities, and political orders through enduring leadership, care, and advocacy. Methodologically, we read between the lines to identify gendered absences and community voices that institutional narratives often leave out. The literature we engage shows settler colonialism operating as a gendered and racist structure that constrains Indigenous women's and gender diverse peoples' decisionmaking power, shapes how institutions treat them, and then obscures the resulting harms through law and policy. Alongside this analysis, our submission will also draw on publicly documented reproductive rights violations, including the Standing Senate Committee on Human Right's work on forced and coerced sterilization in Canada as a serious violation of bodily autonomy and consent, with Indigenous women among those most affected.



*Artwork by
Nadya Crossman-Serb (2025)*

Please provide information on historical practices that affected the sexual and reproductive health and rights of Indigenous women and girls in your country or region, providing specifics on forms and type of violations.

In Canada, settler colonialism has shaped historical practices that harmed the sexual and reproductive health and rights of Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people.¹ These practices worked through displacement from land and disruption of family life, undermining autonomy, agency, and safety.² They were reinforced by legal and institutional systems that regulated belonging, mobility, and access to community support, and often treated Indigenous women's bodies as available for control, coercion, and neglect.³

These dynamics were reinforced through law and policy that regulated Indigenous women's mobility, property, and identity, and entrenched dependency within imposed family structures.⁴ The Indian Act and related governance regimes restricted women's rights and participation and positioned Indigenous women primarily in relation to husbands and fathers, rather than as rights holders and decision makers in their own communities.⁵ Indian Act sex-based rules contributed directly to displacement off reserve.⁶ By stripping some women of status and community ties after marriage, these rules meant loss of access to traditional land base, housing, services, and family networks and further constrained reproductive autonomy.⁷

Reserve land and property rules also carried gendered effects. For example, land holding mechanisms such as location tickets were structured to flow through male heirs, and widows could face conditional access, which increased economic insecurity and constrained women's ability to participate in local economies and sustain households on terms chosen by women.⁸ These restrictions on movement and livelihood sit within a wider framework that dictates who can live where, how families stay together, and whether women can maintain material conditions for parenting, health, and community ties.⁹ The cumulative effect is a long-running legal architecture that disrupted family structures and constrained decision-making power in ways directly connected to reproductive au-

¹ Native Women's Association of Canada, SRH Literature Review (November 2024), 6–7; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, vol 1a (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2019), 254–55.

² National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 254–55.

³ Ibid, 254–55, 386–87.

⁴ Mary Eberts, "Victoria's Secret: How the Indian Act and Colonial Stereotypes Dispossessed First Nations Women," in *Indigenous Women and the Law in Canada*, eds (2014), 149–52; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 254–55.

⁵ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 386–87; Mary Eberts, "Victoria's Secret," 150–53.

⁶ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 386–87.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Isabel Altamirano Jiménez, Sarah Nickel, and waaseyaa'sin Christine Sy, "Colonialism, Land, Bodies, and Indigeneity," in *An Introduction to Indigenous Feminisms* (London, Routledge, 2025), 96.

⁹ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 145–147.

tonomy and safety.¹⁰

Intertwined throughout all of these legislative measures was the production and circulation of colonial stereotypes that dehumanized Indigenous women and framed them as available for violation, while rendering their reports of harm less credible to institutions.¹¹ These narratives reinforced legal architecture to normalize gendered violence and sustain state and public indifference, including within policing, courts, and health systems.¹²

Against this background, Canada's public record includes specific reproductive rights violations, including forced and coerced sterilization, documented by the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights.¹³ This constitutes a direct violation of bodily autonomy and has disproportionately impacted Indigenous women.¹⁴ These historical practices align with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' (MMIWG) conclusion that a sustained pattern of racial and gendered violence constitutes genocide against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people.¹⁵ At the same time, it is imperative to note that Indigenous women have always resisted, sustaining collective ties, defending bodily and land sovereignty, and pressing for accountability through the very systems that were designed to erase them.¹⁶

Were there, in your country or region practices, policies or programs that aimed at reducing or controlling the population of Indigenous Peoples, including through violation of Indigenous women and girls' reproductive health and rights? If so, please provide as much details as possible.

Efforts to reduce or control Indigenous populations have operated through multiple interlocking laws and institutions that disrupted Indigenous families, displaced communities, and constrained Indigenous women and girls' reproductive autonomy. The MMIWG Inquiry describes a "manifest pattern" of state conduct that includes child overapprehension, forced sterilization, and the ongoing impacts of Indian Act governance.¹⁷ Forced and coerced sterilization is one of the most direct population control practices documented in Canada. This history includes provincial eugenics laws in Alberta and British Columbia that enabled sterilization without consent, and evidence that Indigenous peoples were disproportionately targeted.¹⁸ The Senate Committee evidence also describes how sterilizations continued in federally operated "Indian hospitals" with research indicating roughly

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Mary Eberts, "Victoria's Secret," 149-153.

¹² National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 174-175, 254-255.

¹³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry: Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Persons in Canada* (Ottawa: Senate of Canada, 2021), Part II.

¹⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry*, Part II, 8.

¹⁵ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 174.

¹⁶ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 174-175; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Calls for Justice* (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2019), 1-2.

¹⁷ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Supplementary Report: Genocide* (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2019), 25.

¹⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Persons in Canada* (Ottawa: Senate of Canada, June 2021), 18.

1,150 Indigenous women sterilized over about a decade up to the early 1970s, alongside inadequate consent processes, racism, and paternalism shaping decision making.¹⁹ The same Committee concluded the practice has continued into recent years and is underreported, including reports as recent as 2018.²⁰ Coercion has also operated through the threat of family separation. Testimony describes situations

where Indigenous women were told they must accept sterilization or risk their children being placed in the child welfare system.²¹ Testimony also describes “consent” being sought during childbirth or under extreme stress, medication, and power imbalance, undermining free, prior, and informed consent.²²

Canada also implemented population control through systematic child removal, which fractures kinship and weakens community continuity across generations. As the residential school system waned in many regions, state measures shifted toward child welfare.²³ This was enabled in part by the 1951 Indian Act amendments that expanded the application of provincial laws to “Indians” and facilitated intergovernmental arrangements for child welfare services.²⁴ The shift produced dramatic increases in Indigenous children taken into care, with Indigenous children soon representing a third of all children in care in some contexts.²⁵ The Sixties Scoop is described as the late 1950s to 1990 period in which more than 20,000 Indigenous children were taken, with little regard for culture or wellbeing.²⁶ The MMIWG Inquiry documents coercive practices, including mothers being told a baby was stillborn, or being pressured to sign adoption papers while medicated.²⁷ It also describes targeted adoption programs such as Saskatchewan’s Adopt Indian Métis program, which actively encouraged the adoption of Indigenous children into non-Indigenous homes.²⁸

“Birth alerts” were also identified as a discriminatory practice used against Indigenous mothers, allowing newborn apprehension on that basis alone.²⁹ Birth alerts were issued to hospitals by child and family services to flag a pregnant person as “high risk,” often without transparent criteria or notice.³⁰ They could trigger surveillance at delivery and immediate apprehension of a newborn, reinforcing the pattern of child removal beginning at birth.³¹

These practices show how population control operates through reproductive violations that limit the ability to have children and through family disruption that removes children and breaks in-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry*, Part II, 18.

²² *Ibid.*, 17-18.

²³ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 280.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 280, 343-344.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 280-281.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 281.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 355.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 364-365.

³¹ *Ibid.*

tergenerational continuity. Structural poverty and colonial governance reinforce this pattern and the state then reframes its impacts as individual “neglect” or “unfitness.”³²

Have there been an official recognition by the Government of such historical injustices against Indigenous women and girls in your country or region? If so, what measures or actions have been taken by the Government to redress those wrongs and promote reconciliation?

Canada has offered forms of official recognition but has often stopped at acknowledgement or incremental reform rather than full remedy and accountability. In the context of sex-based discrimination, the federal government has repeatedly amended the Indian Act to respond to court findings and sustained advocacy, including the 1985 amendments that ended the “marrying out” rule and resorted status to many women and their children.³³ At the same time, those amendments created a two-tier system of registration that limited many reinstated women and their descendants to Section 6(2), meaning status could not be passed on beyond the next generation in the same way as male lines.³⁴ The MMIWG Inquiry notes that Canada’s pattern has been incremental legislative reform, often prompted by litigation, and even after multiple cases, discrimination still remains.³⁵

Recognition also exists through national processes that explicitly frame redress as action. The MMIWG Inquiry’s Calls for Justice are written as imperatives for redress and transformation, not symbolic gestures, and include concrete measures such as ending birth alerts.³⁶ Recognition has also occurred through government-led redress processes tied to mass child removal, including the Sixties Scoop, and provincial level apologies in some jurisdictions, though the scope and consistency of these responses remain uneven.³⁷ On reproductive violence, parliamentary study has documented ongoing forced and coerced sterilization and has called for impartial investigation, accountability, and adequate redress, including a formal apology and compensation measures.³⁸ The continued documentation of recent cases, alongside the emphasis on remedy, reinforces the gap this submission identifies; acknowledgment has not consistently translated to meaningful action and accountability.

³² National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 380-381; Mary Eberts, “Victoria’s Secret,” 149-151.

³³ Shelagh Day, “Equal Status for Indigenous Women, Sometime, Not Now: The Indian Act and Bill S 3,” *Canadian Woman Studies, Les cahiers de la femme* 33, nos. 1-2 (2018): 177.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 176.

³⁵ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 376-377.

³⁶ National Inquiry, *Calls for Justice*, 196, Call 12.8.

³⁷ Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, “Sixties Scoop Agreement in Principle” (news release, October 6, 2017), Government of Canada; Government of Manitoba, “Premier Selinger Acknowledges Suffering of First Nation, Métis, Inuit Children Across Canada During the ‘60s Scoop” (news release, June 18, 2015), Province of Manitoba.

³⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry*, Part II, 32, 40.

How have the victims been cared for? Have they been provided with spaces and means to call for justice and reparation?

Care for victims and families has come in part through spaces to speak, organize, and demand justice, but supports too often depend on Indigenous communities carrying that work themselves. Recent work on the Manitoba-based Red Dress Alert project shows what targeted and affected people and their families have been asking for, namely for systems that respond immediately, treat families with respect, and stay with them for as long as it takes.³⁹

The Calls for Justice are a clear example of a survivor-led, and family-informed process that frames redress as practical action. They call for stable, ongoing funding for Indigenous centered, community-based health and wellness services, including trauma informed programs led by Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and holistic wraparound supports that are accessible, including mobile trauma and addictions recovery teams.⁴⁰ They also call for permanent empowerment funding to support Indigenous-led initiatives, including for people isolated from their Nations through colonial violence.⁴¹

At the same time, the gap between what justice requires and what systems deliver shows up in the day-to-day reality families described. In Red Dress Alert engagement, families emphasized the need for an immediate point of contact who can help coordinate searches, guide the early steps of reporting, and ask as a consistent advocate while a loved one is missing.⁴² Many also described reluctance to contact police because authorities are not viewed as trustworthy or culturally competent, and stressed the first point of contact should not be a police officer.⁴³ They discussed wanting designated Aunties and Kookums including 2SLGBTQQA+ support people who are trusted, culturally safe, and able to act quickly.⁴⁴

The Red Dress Alert model is far more than an alert. It is meant to be a coordinated safety framework that is culturally safe and trauma informed, with continuous, around the clock wrap-around supports.⁴⁵ Families stressed the need for culturally safe counselling and supporting immediately, not only after a case is treated as criminal or media worthy.⁴⁶ The core justice issue here is one of resourcing and control. Giganawenimaanaanig, the Indigenous-led organization spearheading the Red Dress Alert, has been clear that the system must be adequately resourced across regions and that implementation depends on confirmed, ongoing federal and provincial support.⁴⁷ It has also stressed that the organization must retain control over the system and its data.⁴⁸

³⁹ Giganawenimaanaanig, *Red Dress Alert What We Heard Report* (Manitoba, 2025), 2; Giganawenimaanaanig, *Red Dress Alert Final Report* (Manitoba, 2025), 11.

⁴⁰ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 181.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 180.

⁴² Giganawenimaanaanig, *What We Heard Report*, 29.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 14, 29.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, 29.

⁴⁵ Giganawenimaanaanig, *Final Report*, 6.

⁴⁶ Giganawenimaanaanig, *What We Heard Report*, 29.

⁴⁷ Giganawenimaanaanig, *Final Report*, 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

Please describe the main barriers faced by Indigenous women and girls in accessing sexual and reproductive health services, including the nature and root causes of these challenges. Please provide information on measures taken, if any, to ensure inclusive and culturally appropriate healthcare for Indigenous women?

Barriers to sexual and reproductive healthcare for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people are predictable outcomes of structural conditions, not individual choices. Geography in particular remains a primary constraint. More than half of First Nations people living on reserves may need to travel 50 to 350 kilometers to give birth which separates people from support network and increases exposure to racism and discrimination in unfamiliar urban settings.⁴⁹ Financial and logistical pressures heighten these barriers as coordination challenges can make timely access more difficult.⁵⁰

Systemic racism, and power imbalances can shape patient safety, consent, and whether people return for follow up care. The Senate studies on forced and coerced sterilization document how language and cultural barriers increase pressure during vulnerable moments, and power imbalances can undermine free and informed consent.⁵¹ In Manitoba and other jurisdictions, child welfare practices can directly push people away from accessing prenatal and birth-related care.⁵² The MMIWG Inquiry describes how birth alert systems disproportionately affect Indigenous mothers, can be activated without the mother's knowledge, and can lead to apprehension at birth.⁵³ Measures aimed at comprehensive culturally-appropriate care are strongest where Indigenous communities lead design and delivery.⁵⁴ They are also strongest where services are grounded in the core needs and realities of the people they serve, including sustained resourcing to expand Indigenous midwifery and doula services.⁵⁵

Please provide information on existing systems or mechanisms to monitor and document cases of mistreatment, abuse and violence in reproductive healthcare settings. Kindly also elaborate on challenges encountered in documenting such abuses and share any good practices to strengthen accountability.

In Canada, documentation of mistreatment, abuse, and violence in reproductive health care settings relies on a patchwork of complaint and oversight pathways. People can raise concerns through local health system complaint pathways, and through professional regulators when the concern relates to a specific provider.⁵⁶ Some jurisdictions also have independent Patient Ombudsman offices that review complaints about health sector organizations and help resolve them outside the

⁴⁹ Native Women's Association of Canada, *SRH Literature Review*, 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

⁵¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry*, Part II, 17-18.

⁵² National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 386.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 364-365.

⁵⁴ National Inquiry, *Calls for Justice*, 189, Call 7.1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 189-190, Calls 7.4, 7.7-7.8

⁵⁶ Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long Term Care, "Where do I go if I have a health care concern, complaint or compliment?", Government of Manitoba, n.d. <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/concerns.html>; College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba, "Complaint Process," n.d. <https://www.cpsm.mb.ca/complaints/complaint-process>.

institution's internal process.⁵⁷ Human rights commissions and civil litigation can also play a role, but these options are uneven in accessibility and often place the burden of proof and process of navigation on the person harmed.

Challenges in documenting abuses include underreporting driven by fear and distrust, which are compounded when language access and culturally safe supports are missing at the point of disclosure.⁵⁸ A major barrier within this is that abuses remain hard to track at scale because health authorities do not collect the necessary information to identify patterns, and survivors have emphasized the need for anonymity and trauma informed documentation.⁵⁹ The Parliamentary study on forced and coerced sterilization similarly underscores the need for accountability, including independent investigation and remedies, because abuses can be obscured when reporting depends only on individual complaints.⁶⁰

Through support for Indigenous data sovereignty, it is possible to create mechanisms that centre strength based and culturally relevant measures for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender diverse relations. Investing in Indigenous data sovereignty also supports the development of place-based, accessible, and distinctionbased resources that can inform policy and support decision making for justice and service quality. A current challenge is that accountability to the MMIWG Inquiry's Calls for Justice through Indigenous Peoples' right to data is often overlooked, which limits informed policy, redress, transparent reporting, and the linkages that support justice and quality improvement in services needed to create systems of change.⁶¹

Good practices to strengthen accountability include Indigenous-led documentation models that prioritize Indigenous data sovereignty and community control over systems and data. The Red Dress Alert work led by Giganawenimaanaanig is a useful accountability and it has been clear that sustained government funding and Indigenous control are conditions of effectiveness.⁶²

Please describe measures taken to integrate Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, and intercultural approaches within the formal healthcare system, with a view to ensuring continuity, quality of care, and effective referral mechanisms. Please kindly elaborate on measures adopted to ensure that sexual and reproductive healthcare is delivered in Indigenous languages and in culturally acceptable ways.

Across Canada, measures to integrate Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, and approaches into formal health care have come through a mix of Indigenous-led services, provincial and territorial health systems, and federal funding and policy commitments. These measures must include frameworks where Indigenous communities lead the design and delivery, and where services are centrally grounded in Indigenous languages and practices.⁶³

⁵⁷ Patient Ombudsman, "Home," n.d. <https://patientombudsman.ca/>.

⁵⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *Forced and Coerced Sterilization*, 20.

⁵⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry, Part II*, 38.

⁶⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry, Part II*, 25, 38.

⁶¹ National Inquiry, *Calls for Justice*, 53, 215-216.

⁶² Giganawenimaanaanig, *Final Report*, 3, 12.

⁶³ National Inquiry, *Calls for Justice*, 189-190, Calls 7.1, 7.4, 7.7-7.8.

The Calls for Justice set this standard clearly, calling on governments and healthcare providers to recognize that Indigenous Peoples are experts in their own healing, and that services work best when they are designed and delivered by the Indigenous peoples they serve.⁶⁴ They also call for permanent resourcing for specialized intervention, healing, and treatment services offered in Indigenous languages, alongside provider training that includes local language and culture, anti-racism, and local health practices.⁶⁵ The focus on language and cultural safety responds to documented harms within mainstream systems.⁶⁶ The MMIWG Inquiry describes how patients relied on Indigenous staff as interpreters and how institutional care contributed to language loss and disconnection from family.⁶⁷

In the context of sexual and reproductive health, the Senate study highlights Indigenous midwifery as a specific approach for culturally safe care, including access to services in Indigenous languages.⁶⁸ It notes federal investments to support Indigenous midwifery and doula initiatives, including Budget 2021 funding.⁶⁹ It also includes Inuit testimony describing evacuation for childbirth as socially and culturally harmful and calling for a bridge between Indigenous approaches and western medicine.⁷⁰ Effective referral frameworks depend on culturally safe navigation being built in. For example, Manitoba Red Dress Alert work maps Indigenous-led counselling, referral, and advocacy supports that coordinate with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and other agencies, and it highlights crisis response models that include Indigenous language supports.⁷¹ It also points to multilingual supports through Indigenous Services Canada, including helplines offering support in multiple indigenous languages.⁷²

Please share any promising practices, community-led initiatives, or policy measures that have effectively improved Indigenous women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights.

One pathway forward is Indigenous-led sexual and reproductive care, especially when it comes to Indigenous midwifery and doula models, which the Senate study frames as a practical way to improve culturally safe care and strengthen access in Indigenous languages.⁷³ This avenue also responds directly to what many people described as the core harm in coerced sterilization cases, including power imbalance, lack of informed consent, and unsafe institutional environments.⁷⁴

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 89 Call 7.1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 189-190 Calls 7.5-7.6.

⁶⁶ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 270.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

⁶⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry*, Part II, 36-37.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 27.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 36-37.

⁷¹ Giganawenimaanaanig, *Final Report*, 6.

⁷² Giganawenimaanaanig, *What We Heard Report*, 94.

⁷³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry*, Part II, 36-37.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 17-18.

Another promising direction is building Indigenous-led, trauma informed, wraparound supports that are available immediately and remain available long after a crisis or a disclosure. The Red Dress Alert by Giganawenimaanaanig offers a promising template as it treats safety and response as a coordinated system, with Indigenous control, trusted non-police entry points, and clear resourcing requirements.⁷⁵ This logic translates well to specific reproductive healthcare settings, especially for reporting, navigation, and follow up support.

A third practice is Indigenous data sovereignty as a condition for improvement and accountability. Harm remains difficult to track when systems do not collect information; and when survivors do not trust where disclosures go.⁷⁶ Indigenous controlled measures and data governance can support transparent reporting, policy change, and service quality improvement without repeating extractive approaches.

Finally, policy measures that remove discriminatory practices and build safer pathways matter. The Calls for Justice provide measures in related systems including ending birth alerts, and they frame safety as requiring stable long-term resourcing rather than short term projects.⁷⁷ The broader approach of stable funding, culturally grounded services, and enforceable accountability is a credible template for improving sexual health and rights in ways aligned with autonomy and safety. This framing also points to the need for clear, monitored implementation, so commitments translate into measurable changes in access, consent practices, and outcomes, rather than remaining aspirational.

Please, provide any additional information relevant to the topic of the report.

Policy reform matters, but it must be informed by the reality that harm is also shaped by everyday attitudes that decide who is believed, who is treated with care, and whose pain is minimized. Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people have never been passive in the face of these conditions. They have organized, cared for one another, and insisted on accountability, including through institutions that have enacted, enabled, and sustained genocidal violence against them.⁷⁸ Colonial stereotypes of Indigenous women as hypersexual, careless, or unfit mothers have been used to excuse violence, justify state intrusion into families, and dismiss reports of harm, with predictable spillover into healthcare interactions and consent practices.⁷⁹ This matters in reproductive health settings because stereotypes do not stay in the media or history, they travel into avenues like intake questions and credibility assessments.

A credible roadmap forward must address both the formal aspects and informal conditions that make mistreatment possible. This means anti-racism and gender-based training that names these specific tropes. Meaningful oversight that can identify patterns and Indigenous controlled approaches to documentation and improvement, so services respond to lived realities rather than

⁷⁵ Giganawenimaanaanig, Final Report, 6, 12; Giganawenimaanaanig, *What We Heard Report*, 29.

⁷⁶ National Inquiry, *Calls for Justice*, 215-216; Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry*, Part II, 38.

⁷⁷ National Inquiry, *Calls for Justice*, 181, 196 Calls 3.2-3.4, 12.8.

⁷⁸ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, vol 1a, 174-175; National Inquiry, *Calls for Justice*, 1-2.

⁷⁹ Mary Eberts, "Victoria's Secret," 149-53; Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *The Scars That We Carry*, Part II, 17-18.

assumptions. This work also needs to recognize Indigenous knowledge, language, and community-based support as core conditions of safety and not as operational add-ons. These spaces of care are also spaces of resistance, and it is essential to make care safe and ensure that calls for justice lead to continuous change and transformation.

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This submission is from a research team located at the Centre for Human Rights Research (CHRR) at the University of Manitoba, Canada. Established in 2012, the CHRR uses an intersectional lens to research and advocate for human rights and Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence. The CHRR is home to the **“Calling for Justice and Re-Imagining Governance: The Rematriation of Indigenous Women’s Human Rights and the Obligations of All Governments”** Knowledge Synthesis project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) in partnership with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and UK Research and Innovation Arts and Humanities Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council. The 2025 competition focused on the theme “Envisioning Governance Systems that Work“, which calls to imagine collaborative and proactive approaches to governance to face today’s multifaceted issues.



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