



Changing the Relationship

WHAT WE HEARD

In response the draft action plan on missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people

Changer les Relations

CE QUE NOUS AVONS ENTENDU

En réponse à la plan de action pour les femmes, les filles et les personnes 2ELGBTQQIA+ autochtones disparues et assassinées



Le present document contient la traduction française du résumé et du message du ministre.

ENGLISH

FRENCH

CREE

TŁJCHO

CHIPEWYAN

SOUTH SLAVEY

NORTH SLAVEY

GWICH'IN

INUVIALUKTUN

INUKTITUT

INUINNAQTUN

1-866-561-1664



For immediate emotional assistance, call 1-844-413-6649. This is a national, toll-free 24/7 crisis call line providing support for anyone who requires emotional assistance related to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

The NWT Help Line offers free support to residents of the Northwest Territories, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is 100% free and confidential. The NWT Help Line also has an option for follow-up calls. Residents can call the help line at 1-800-661-0844.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Government of the Northwest Territories would like to acknowledge and honour the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people who have suffered from violence and who have been, and continue to be, cruelly taken from their families and loved ones.

We acknowledge the strength and resilience of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, survivors, family members, friends, and the communities who support them, and who continue to fight for justice.

It takes many to work on and complete a project like this. The Gender Equity Division would like to thank all those who helped prepare this document. The cooperation received is indicative of the importance placed on this work.

A grateful thank you also to those community residents who took the time to share their thoughts and their concerns during the community engagement process.

And lastly, marsi cho to Michael Mifflin of Mifflin Consulting Co. Your invaluable help with this project will not be forgotten.





Contents

Executive summary	ii
Sommaire	iii
Introduction	1
The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls	1
2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ National Action Plan	1
Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People ..	1
Government of the Northwest Territories Response to the 231 Calls for Justice	2
Preliminary Engagement	2
How we engaged	3
Terminology workshop	5
What we heard	6
Culture	6
Health and Wellness	11
Justice	14
Human Security	17
Going Forward	21
Conclusion	22

Executive summary

In December 2021, Caroline Wawzonek, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, tabled ***“Changing the Relationship” the GNWT’s Draft Action Plan in Response to the Calls for Justice on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ People.***

Intended to dismantle colonialism and racial and gendered discrimination from all levels of government and public institutions, the Draft Action Plan explains how the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) will work to change the relationship between the GNWT’s departments, agencies, employees, policies, and processes; and their daily encounters with Indigenous women, girls and two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual plus (2SLGBTQIA+) people.

The GNWT is committed to incorporating the lived experience of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the completion of the Action Plan. In Summer 2022, the GNWT Gender Equity Division travelled to 12 communities engage with Indigenous governments, community governments, other partners, people with lived experience and all NWT residents to seek feedback on the Draft Action Plan.

This report presents the results of engagement activities¹ conducted between May 31 and September 13, 2022, and is organized according to the four key areas of rights violations identified in *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*: Culture, Health and Wellness, Justice, and Human Security.

The Gender Equity Division has revised the Draft Action Plan to more accurately address comments and concerns raised during engagement, but overall, the Draft Action Plan was determined to address the majority of issues identified. The ***Final Action Plan in Response to the Calls for Justice on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ People*** was tabled in the 19th Legislative Assembly on November 2, 2022 alongside this What We Heard report.

¹ A supporting report is also available online with the results of [preliminary engagements](#) conducted in June 2021 with the Native’s Women’s Association of the NWT, the Status of Women Council of the NWT, and

with community contacts consisting of appointed representatives from Indigenous governments.

Sommaire

En décembre 2021, Caroline Wawzonek, ministre responsable de la Condition féminine a présenté ***Changer les relations : le plan d'action provisoire du GTNO en réponse aux appels à la justice pour les femmes, les filles et les personnes 2ELGBTQQIA+ autochtones disparues et assassinées.***

Destiné à lutter contre le colonialisme ainsi que la discrimination raciale et sexuelle à tous les ordres de gouvernement et dans toutes les institutions publiques, le plan d'action provisoire explique comment le gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (GTNO) va s'efforcer de changer les relations entre les ministères, les organismes et les employés du GTNO lors de leurs rencontres quotidiennes avec les femmes, les filles et les personnes 2ELGBTQQIA+ autochtones, ainsi que les politiques et les processus du GTNO sur le sujet.

Le GTNO s'engage à intégrer l'expérience vécue des femmes, des filles et des personnes 2ELGBTQQIA+ autochtones dans la réalisation de ce plan d'action. Au cours de l'été 2022, la Division de l'équité des genres du GTNO s'est déplacée dans douze collectivités pour solliciter les commentaires des gouvernements autochtones, des administrations communautaires, d'autres partenaires, des personnes ayant une expérience vécue et de tous les Ténos afin d'orienter le plan d'action provisoire.

Ce rapport présente les résultats des échanges¹ avec le public menés entre le 31 mai et le 13 septembre 2022. Il est organisé selon les quatre domaines clés de violation des droits identifiés dans Réclamer notre pouvoir et notre place, le rapport final de l'Enquête nationale sur les femmes et les filles autochtones disparues et assassinées : la culture, la santé et le bien-être, la sécurité des personnes, et la justice.

La Division de l'équité des genres a révisé le plan d'action provisoire afin de répondre de façon plus précise aux préoccupations et aux commentaires soulevés lors des séances d'échanges, mais dans l'ensemble, il a été déterminé que le plan d'action provisoire répondait à la majorité des problèmes identifiés. Le **plan d'action final du GTNO en réponse aux appels à la justice pour les femmes, les filles et les personnes 2ELGBTQQIA+ autochtones disparues et assassinées** a été déposé devant la 19e Assemblée législative le 2 novembre 2022, en même temps que le présent Rapport sur ce que nous avons entendu.

Un rapport justificatif est également disponible en ligne. Il présente les résultats des [échanges préliminaires](#) menés en juin 2021 auprès de l'Association des femmes autochtones des TNO, du Conseil sur la condition de la femme des TNO et

des contacts communautaires représentant les gouvernements autochtones.

Introduction

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was launched by the federal, provincial, and territorial governments in 2016 in response to the recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and decades of advocacy by families and grassroots Indigenous organizations. Commissioners of the National Inquiry were directed to examine and report on institutional policies and practices put in place as a response to violence, including those that have proven effective in reducing violence and increasing the safety of Indigenous women and girls.

The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (Final Report) includes 231 Calls for Justice and includes a Call for federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous governments, in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, to develop and implement a National Action Plan and regional specific plans.

The Calls for Justice took a theme-based approach with its Calls for Justice largely focused on the following themes:

- Culture
- Health and Wellness
- Justice
- Human Security

2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ National Action Plan

The [National Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People](#) (National Action Plan) was released on June 3, 2021. The National Action Plan is the result of collaboration between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, along with Indigenous governments and Indigenous partners, who were called upon to work together to address issues raised in the Final Report. The GNWT along with all provinces and territories contributed to the development of the National Action Plan by reporting on current programs, services, and activities that respond to the Calls for Justice.

Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People.

In conjunction with the National Action Plan, the Government of Canada also released a document titled “Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People” (Federal Pathway), representing Canada’s proposed contribution to the National Action Plan. It outlines the Government of Canada’s commitments to addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The Government of Canada also committed to undertake work with Indigenous partners to develop an implementation plan for this Federal Pathway.

Government of the Northwest Territories Response to the 231 Calls for Justice

On December 8, 2021, the GNWT Minister Responsible for the Status of Women tabled ***“Changing the Relationship” the GNWT’s Draft Action Plan in Response to the Calls for Justice on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People***. The GNWT’s Draft Action Plan is intended to begin the necessary process of addressing colonialism and racial and gendered discrimination from all levels of government and public institutions. Through the Action Plan, the GNWT is seeking to change the relationship between the GNWT’s departments, agencies, employees, policies and processes and their daily encounters with Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

The GNWT’s Draft Action Plan is the culmination of six years of work to understand the underlying issues contributing to the crisis of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, and the scope of what might be needed to address this crisis of violence and racism.

This work began in February 2015 when the GNWT chaired the first National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Ottawa. In 2018, the GNWT made presentations at Expert Hearings of the National Inquiry, and immediately following the release of the Final Report of the National Inquiry in 2019, the GNWT prepared an initial response entitled **“Doing Our Part”**. In 2020, the GNWT followed up with “Taking Action” a workplan to address the Calls for Justice.

Preliminary Engagement

Over a period of 18 months, the Gender Equity Division (which provides support to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women) collaborated with GNWT departments to conduct an in-depth internal review and analysis of its programs and services.

The results of this review were used to guide preliminary engagement workshops that took place in June 2021 with the Native’s Women’s Association of the NWT, the Status of Women Council of the NWT, and with community contacts consisting of appointed representatives from Indigenous governments. These partners reviewed the results of the GNWT’s self-assessment of current programs and services and made recommendations on concrete actions that should be addressed in the GNWT’s Action Plan.

The feedback received guided the preparation of the GNWT’s response to the Calls for Justice and the development of the Draft Action Plan. A “What We Heard” report from the preliminary engagement workshops is available online at: https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/mmiwg_action_plan-preliminary_engagement-what_we_heard.pdf

How we engaged

In April 2022, Minister Wawzonek sent a letter to all Indigenous governments advising that the GNWT would undertake community engagement on the Draft Action Plan during Summer 2022 and the Gender Equity Division shared a draft community engagement schedule with Indigenous governments, seeking approval from local leadership to visit their communities.²

Factors taken into consideration when developing the schedule included the scheduled papal visit to Canada, the Lac St. Ann Pilgrimage, scheduled annual gatherings and other community activities. Several communities declined requests to hold Open Houses in their respective community by stating that there were too many conflicting activities already scheduled during the summer months.

Prior to the scheduling of the community engagement sessions, presentations were also made to the NWT Council of Leaders and to the NWT Shelters. The Community Contacts identified by Indigenous governments were kept updated on the schedule for the community engagement sessions and their advice was sought when working on scheduling engagement activities in the communities.

Mental health support and interpretation services were provided during all the engagement sessions. In most cases, those interpreter/translators who participated in the terminology workshop were contracted to provide interpreting services at the engagement sessions. There was a lot of positive feedback received about the provision of mental health supports during these community visits.

Staff of the Native Women's Association were also invited to travel with the Gender Equity Division team to participate in the engagement activities in the communities. Staff of the NWA also assisted by providing mental health support and assisted with organizing community events.

In total, the Gender Equity Division travelled to 12 communities across the NWT, hosted 11 Open Houses in communities and provided 6 presentations to Indigenous Governments and community governments. Community Engagement took place across the Northwest Territories as follows:

² Where there was more than one Indigenous government, all the Indigenous governments in

that community were contacted, including municipal offices.

Date	Community	Activities
June 28, 2022	Fort Smith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation to Mayor and Council - Open House - Visited the Women's Shelter
July 4, 2022	Fort Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House
July 5, 2022	Kátł'odeeche First Nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House
July 6, 2022	Hay River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House - Visited and met with staff at the Women's Shelter
July 7, 2022	Hay River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation to Mayor and Council - Tour of the Therapeutic Community Program – South Mackenzie Correctional Centre
July 7, 2022	West Point First Nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation to Chief and Council
August 4, 2022	Yellowknife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House
August 15, 2022	Aklavik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House
August 16, 2022	Inuvik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House
August 17, 2022	Fort McPherson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation at GTC Annual General Assembly
August 19, 2022	Inuvik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House (requested by community members)
September 6, 2022	Norman Wells	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation to Mayor and Council
September 7, 2022	Tulita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House
September 8, 2022	Déljne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House
September 13, 2022	Whatì	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open House

Terminology workshop

During the preliminary engagement sessions, the GNWT heard that Indigenous languages should be a featured component of community engagement on the Draft Action Plan.

The Gender Equity Division worked in partnership with the Native Women's Association of the NWT to host a three-day terminology workshop in June 2022 involving interpreter/translators, Elders, people with lived experience, youth, and other community resource people.

The purpose of the workshop was to review and develop terminology in the Indigenous languages related to MMIWG, gender-based violence and family violence. In preparation for this workshop, the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women reached out to the Indigenous Leadership to submit names of interpreter/translators for all the NWT Indigenous languages along with names of Elders to participate in this workshop. The Gender Equity Division also worked with GNWT departments and other partners to compile a list of terms related to Missing and Murdered Women and Girls, gender-based violence and family violence.

At the 3-day workshop, Indigenous language experts reviewed and discussed terminology and were asked to identify words in their Indigenous languages for which an equivalent English translation would need to be identified. This approach provides a unique opportunity for non-Indigenous language speakers, to gain a perspective on the Indigenous way of thinking and being.

In total, over 130 Indigenous language terms were developed related to MMIWG, gender-based violence, family violence and intimate partner violence. An Indigenous languages terminology booklet is also currently in development and will be made available later this year.

A media briefing was arranged at the conclusion of the terminology workshop. The media briefing

was provided by the participants and received good coverage, both territorially and nationally. Feedback received was very positive and a recommendation was made to hold a follow up workshop and for all departments to consider holding similar workshops.

Interpreter/translators who participated in the terminology workshop were hired to provide interpreting services for the Open Houses held in their respective communities.

Earlier this week, I had the honour to share lunch with the participants at the translators' workshop. It was a deeply moving experience. They were not merely asking how to explain a particular word in a different language. They were discussing the root meanings of those words and the cultural understanding or expression underlying it.

I heard that historically sexuality, sexual preferences, and gender expression was more fluid and that discrimination against 2SLGBTQIA peoples was something taught or imposed by colonialism.

I learned that there were traditional words for people whose genders had changed after birth and there was no disrespectfulness associated with this. Rather, it reflected the individual as a person.

I heard sadness and frustration at the cultural loss of the traditional esteem once accorded to two spirited people. The speakers described that people who were gifted with elements of both genders were revered because having gifts incorporating both genders placed them closer to the Creator.

—Honourable Caroline Wawzonek
Minister's Statement: June 3rd, 2022

What we heard

Most of the people who attended the Open House or sat in on the presentations had not seen or reviewed the Draft Action Plan. As a result, no specific feedback was provided on the Draft Action Plan itself. However, community residents took advantage of the opportunity to share their concerns and thoughts related to MMIWG.

The following summarizes the comments that were shared with the team during the Open Houses and during the presentations:

Culture

Indigenous hiring in public service

- GNWT hiring practices need to be reviewed to ensure Indigenous people who are qualified to work are being hired. Participants identified many situations where there are qualified Indigenous people in the communities that have a degree and no job. These people have achieved the necessary education but are unable to get a position.
- Equivalencies are good to ensure Indigenous hiring and retention however, some positions require certain education in order to provide safe services (such as counselling).
- Community Wellness Workers were identified as a good example of positions that are being used appropriately and safely in the communities and that recognize equivalencies and require a moderate level of education (they do not require a graduate degree).

Community Wellness Workers are a point of first contact and screening for the Community Counselling Program (CCP) for Mental Health and Addiction Services of the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority. They provide culturally relevant education, health promotion and prevention activities to the community, specifically in the areas of addictions, mental health and family violence and cultural awareness. Qualifications for these positions typically includes a Diploma in the Social Sciences together with one year of relevant experience in a scope of practice or experience solely restricted to addictions, mental health, or family violence. A supervised work experience is also required.

- There are additional employment barriers to recent graduates from smaller communities who would like to participate in the GNWT internship program. (*The GNWT Internship program provides employment opportunities to recent northern graduates in GNWT departments*).
 - Participants noted that most internship positions are located in Yellowknife and there are no moving expense or accommodations included with the internships.
 - Interns from other communities are also disadvantaged by having no home community or family support.
- It was recommended that the Student Financial Assistance program (*which assists NWT residents with the costs of obtaining a post-secondary education*) should also provide a service that connects students to potential employment opportunities.

Language

- The importance of Indigenous Languages and work to revitalize Indigenous languages was raised frequently. Participants were encouraged by the attention shown to supporting Indigenous languages throughout the GNWT's draft action plan and want to see more Dene language literacy classes.
- The importance of GNWT Government Service Officers and the Single Window Service Centres was recognized. Many Government Service Officers provide services in their Indigenous language. Participants wanted to see the GNWT expand the Government Service Officer program.
- Indigenous languages need to be used more in the media so Elders can get the news too, they are impacted by MMIWG and missing family members and are not always able to follow the updates and news when it's not in their language.
- The loss of Indigenous languages was brought up, and the recognition that there is a link between young people who are struggling

socially and emotionally who also can't speak their language, can't talk to Elders, also don't have access to the Elder's spirituality.

- Communities stressed the need for more traditional knowledge, working with Elders, bringing young people out on the land and the need for language to be a part of all programming.

Youth

"At my high school I organized a march to raise awareness about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The turnout was overwhelming! ...with the participation of the whole student population in the march and students and teachers working on awareness and learning activities throughout the entire week".

Youth worker at an NWT Women's Emergency Shelter.

"We need to help young people feel good about themselves ..."

Tulita open house.

- Youth are dealing with serious matters and don't have a voice. All governments should be listening to the youth and there needs to be forums created to provide them with a voice in decision making on programs and services that affect them.
- Youth would like to see a discussion group on MMIWG that involves them, there is a feeling of being left out of policy decision making processes that directly impact them.
- More effort needs to be made to reach out to students about MMIWG. We heard that MMIWG issues was not seen as something that is currently taught in schools.
- There is a need to create space for youth to lead conversation about MMIWG to share their perspectives and priorities.

- Department's responses to the Calls to Justice need to harness the voices of the youth and be at the forefront of what the GNWT is doing and give the youth the platforms to continue using their voices. GNWT should be using the youth's perspectives when developing actions.
- There is a lack of jobs for young people in the communities to help them to develop job skills. There is a need for more skills training for youth, to provide more opportunities in the communities for youth, to provide alternatives to drugs.
- There is interest in GNWT support for community-led programming:
 - An Indigenous led mentorship program similar to a "Big Brothers and Big Sisters" program could help connect youth and Elders using a traditional way of life.
 - Holding an Elders-Youth conference.
 - To take youth out on the land more often – teach them traditional skills and pass on traditional stories, also teach land stewardship – "look after your land"
 - To teach youth about "Healthy Relationships" – it's okay to say no.
 - To help young girls on how to look after themselves, especially when they are menstruating.
 - Encourage more alcohol-free activities – i.e.: youth hand games tournaments, etc.
 - Education the public on how to drink safely and responsibly – target youth about alcohol use.
- There was also much discussion about the needs of youth who leave the community to become students at colleges and universities away from their communities.
 - Too costly for students to go out of the communities (for sporting events and things like that)
 - More support needed for students that leave the community. They should hire someone to support students with how to manage their finances, etc.
- Student liaison worker needed for northern students attending post secondary education. An aunt talked about how proud the community was that they had students from the community who went down south to go to university. She mentioned her nephews first day of class had a class of over 250 students which was more people than in his home community.
- It was also noted that the GNWT needs to ensure they are mitigating the risks to women in the design and implementation of the new University programming and the inclusion of childcare needs of students.

Two Spirit People

- It was noted by an Elder that the use of the number identifier "2SLGBTQIA+" reminded her of the numerical identifiers they were given at residential schools. There was a sense that using the term "two-spirit" is more welcoming, less impersonal.
- There was discussion about the need to consider two-spirit people when designing programming for health, wellness, and justice as the format of delivery by the GNWT or by the community often revolves around segregated Women's or Men's circles. What if a two-spirit person does not feel comfortable or identify with either of these groups?

Support for Community and Non-Government Organization's

- Participants noted that there is so much expectation by government for community or non-profit organizations to provide services that there should be more support to help these organizations succeed.
 - To increase capacity, core funding should be provided to community and non-government organizations for staff positions and operations. This core funding should be included in any program funding models that are targeted at community and non-government delivery.
 - Community and non-government organizations cannot compete with government wages and lose experienced and qualified staff or are unable to hire them in the first place. Core funding would allow these organizations to pay higher wages and plan higher quality programming.
 - There are such strict parameters in place to apply for and report on funding. Funding application and reporting requirements needs to be simplified, standardized across GNWT programs and departments, and greatly reduced in terms of reporting. Facilitator training programs would really help to get more indigenous people interested in delivering programs and to apply for available funding. Many people who are influential in the community or interested in helping to make improvement don't necessarily have the confidence or skills to know how to run programs.
- There was a demand for a funding directory that lists all government and other funding opportunities available in the north. At a minimum, the GNWT needs to collate all of the funding programs of every GNWT department and agency into a single online portal.

- There should also be an effort to ensure that government, community, and non-government organizations are providing an overlap of services that are targeted to the community and are actually meeting the needs of the community.
- The GNWT should ensure that there is a place in each community where people can drop in and find out about programs, have their needs matched with programming and services: talk to an Elders, get help filling out forms or access programming (e.g. spiritual programs, on the land, peer supports) delivered by government, community and non-government organizations working together.
- There should also be more transparency in where the money is going. If organizations receive government funding to run programs, communities should know about this and how the money is meant to be used.

De-Colonizing Decisions, Policies and Programs

“Leaders need to take back their power – our land was taken away without our say so. That’s not right”.

Participant Déljné Open House

- More work is needed to address and minimize the impacts of colonialization. This colonial approach is often still perpetuated in our schools, government policies and procedures, and decision making.
- Government needs to move away from “doing things as they always have” and illuminate the colonial approach that exists in our policies and procedures:
 - How are we looking at educating non-indigenous people?
 - When a program is designed by the government, did they consult with Indigenous people when developing the program?

- Does the design of the program take into consideration the trauma of residential school?
- Is the program, service, or procedure reflective of lived experience in its delivery?
- Large group of people will have differing perspectives on parenting, no right or wrong, working with many perspectives when developing programs.
- Consult with all types and ages, walks of life.
- Participants put a high value on the need for Elders input and said there should be an Elders council for input, and when new policies or programs are being developed to have them contribute.
- Accountability for community engagement is important – appointed community representatives should be changed regularly.
- Social work standards are more concerned with a clean house than enough love and support for children, and need for them to play outside, to be on the land.
- Public Boards (e.g., education, health, etc.) and government committees must have equal representation and equal vote in decisions. Participants noted that some local District Education Authority have no Indigenous members on that board. They also noted that in some cases an Indigenous government is given an observer status without a vote - what's the point of having a seat if you don't have a part in making the decisions.
- People need to get out of their comfort zones to achieve real societal change. Government has been taking care of the people for so long, it is all they know, making it difficult to change. How can we change the relationship between Indigenous people and government? It won't happen overnight.

On the Land and Traditional Teachings

“We need our younger people to learn from us. Maybe young people will share with us why they do what they do.”

Fort Resolution Open House

- Communities stressed need for more traditional knowledge, working with Elders, bringing young people out on the land and the need for language to be a part of all programming.
- There is an interest in more interaction between youth and Elders on-the-land. To create more opportunities for Elders to share their knowledge. On-the-land programs where Elders take out young people, teach them to eat from the land, to see men and women sharing the work, and telling stories. Elders are willing to mentor young people - this one of the messages we heard.
- Homeless people should be taken on the land for long term programming. Many of the homeless are deeply lost in grief and won't talk about it. They benefit from working together on the land, learning to be resilient (get back on their feet on their own) which leads to being in a better position to prevent returning to homelessness.
- Communities are seeking more cultural relevant services, medicine power and on the land responses to mental health, trauma, and men's programs.

Health and Wellness

Lasting Impacts of Residential Schools

“Residential schools...these were “hush, hush’ things you didn’t talk about”.

“We were told don’t cry at night...but crying is an important part of grieving”.

Fort Resolution Open House

- Healing programs are very important to participants, they felt that people had to heal from the residential school impacts to reduce reliance on alcohol which would reduce family violence and harms to women.
- Traditional teachings sometimes create challenges for people (i.e.: don’t cry at night – when grieving, crying is an important part of grieving). Some teachings might have been influenced by the residential schools – kids were told not to cry when they were at the residential school.
- In a conversation about residential schools, an Elders observed that these were “hush, hush’ things you didn’t talk about back then.
- We heard that residential school survivors will benefit from counselling services, many have not dealt with all the residential school deaths and healed from their experiences. As a result, we have broken communities and violence against women.
- MMIWG, residential schools and other historical traumatic events need to be made into documentaries to raise awareness.
- Healing programs were very important to participants in Délı̨ne, they felt that people had to heal from the residential school impacts to reduce reliance on alcohol which would reduce family violence and harms to women.
- There is also a real need for aftercare programs, after people go to treatment and come back to the same circumstances they left.

- During the Open Houses and in discussions with individuals in the communities, it was noted that people in the communities were either not aware of the mental health support services that were available to them or were reluctant to take advantage of that service. Some schools also have counsellors on staff but parents may not necessarily know that that service is available to the children.

Supports for Families

- Back when their family member went missing in the 1970’s, 80’s and 90’s there was no mental health support, internet, or the MMIWG supports they have now. There needs to be more supports for families of missing persons:
 - More funding for families to attend counselling, or to search for them, or to connect them with ways to get information.
 - Family Trauma Treatment is necessary including inpatient, outpatient, and ongoing supports.
 - We need to provide process for closure for these families through ceremony, or legal process to get closure, this may be different for each family, but options to find comfort or acceptance of situation is needed for many families of Missing or Murdered women.
- There needs to be more transparency for what the government is doing with kids in foster care. The system needs to work in transparency and rigor when determining placements for kids in care.
 - Jurisdictional differences also create difficulties for people. For example, Alberta’s Childcare rules and procedures make it difficult to get access to children who are placed in care.
 - Communities want the GNWT to work with the birth families to try and get them to take care of the kids, pay them like they would foster families because not everyone can afford the costs of

- taking care of children.
- There is a need to bolster recruitment efforts to get local families interested in becoming foster families. Foster families in small communities are non-existent, kids to be sent to larger communities, away from their birth families and which causes a lot of trauma.
- Children in permanent care still need to be supported to stay connected to their birth families. We heard about the concerns of one woman whose daughter foster family moved to Alberta. This creates a problem with staying connected and the daughter will soon be on her own as she is 18.
- There is a need for transitional support for youth aging out of care, this is needed to prevent them turning to the streets. Kids in care don't get the help they need to deal with the trauma of their families not being in their lives and when they get out of care, they can be left alone and unsupported.
- We heard about the desire for a different approach to programming teaching parenting skills using traditional knowledge with Elders. It doesn't feel right to have government coming into communities to teach Indigenous people how to parent.

Mental Health Supports

“Grief and loss are hurting our people. Once people can heal properly from the loss of a loved one, they can move past their pain in a better way”.

“We lost the ability to grieve traditionally”.

Kát'odeeche First Nation Open House

- There was widespread desire for more mental health support workers in the communities:
 - Services need to understand and give consideration to the ripple effect crisis and loss has on a community (such as when a suicide occurs)
 - The counselling program needs to do outreach to build relationships in the communities, especially when the counsellors are travelling in.
 - Some participants felt that mental health support and counselors need to come from out of town because of concerns about gossip, and confidentiality, being related to or knowing the counsellor, seeing them around town after sharing traumatic events with them.
- Inmates that are in jail that can't even go home when their parent or grandparent passes. That deepens the pain and trauma and makes it worse that they are surrounded by such a dark cold place.
- Suicide is also a problem in the communities. People didn't talk about this before. More suicide prevention workshops are needed.
- In the Sahtú region, mental health services were delivered out of Norman Wells but there have been vacancies for a couple of years.
- Need for men's MMIWG programing was identified. It was recognized that this was a sensitive issue, but Men must be involved in the healing process and the whole community must come together in instances of domestic violence.

- There is also concern for missing men and boys as well, need for more mental health supports for men, talking circles, healthy relationships.
- Note: Many participants were appreciative of the mental health support workers we brought with us, and who were available to speak to at the open houses, particularly as they also spoke in the Indigenous languages of the communities.

Seniors

- There was some discussion about the needs of seniors in the communities. It was seen as a positive thing that the GNWT had an “aging in place” mandate.
 - Seniors should be supported to do repairs to their housing.
 - Indigenous languages need to be used in media so Elders can get the news too.
 - The need for accessible transportation was identified. It was noted that some communities had no taxis, and if Elders were to attend that they would have to find a ride.
- There was a desire for Chief and council in some communities to have more social issues meetings to address the issue of young people targeting Elders with violence and crime.

Justice

An Open House was held at the Hay River Reserve where the team met a young probation officer who shared that he started renting office space on site so that he can go there once a week to meet with his clients from the reserve. He noted this was well received by his clients who live on the reserve as some of them may not necessarily have rides to meet with him in his office in town. He noted this has cut down on the number of probation breaches.

- There needs to be more Indigenous led supports available for women being released from custody so they can maintain the healing that they received from programs in jail.
- There is an overall need throughout the justice system to support for victim's families and close friends. This includes the need for a community liaison for MMIWG, someone approachable.
- The legal aid lawyers need to receive better training and need to be more eager to work for their clients; it seems like the new lawyers are more eager but are not trained to work with Indigenous populations or in Indigenous communities. Women are going to jail for minor offences, which causes undo trauma and hardship to the woman and to their families. They need healing, not time in jail.
- For those who work within the Justice system, please educate yourselves on colonization, intergenerational trauma, and the child welfare system of Indigenous clients.
- The engagement team conducted a tour of the Therapeutic Community program offered at the South Mackenzie Correctional Centre and met with staff who work on that program. Corrections staff highlighted the importance of working with inmates to transition back into their home community

- Gladue needs to be applied to the victims of crime not just the perpetrators.

Gladue refers to a sentencing principle based on the Criminal Code of Canada which instructs judges, when sentencing or setting bail, to consider: "all available sanctions other than imprisonment that are reasonable in the circumstances, with particular attention to" the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders." Gladue and other changes to the criminal code, give judges discretion to use sanctions outside of the mainstream prisons for Indigenous women and men when appropriate. There are concerns from community justice advocates and Indigenous women's organizations about the use of diversion measures and community sentencing for violent offenders.

Sexual Assault

A woman with lived experience shared with us that after her assault, the court process was very long because of a backlog, leading to tension in the home each time court time came close. Victim Services was very helpful and person-centred but there was not enough coordination between various systems partners (crown, legal aid, victim services, and the courts) and the case was dismissed before the victim was even spoken to in court.

- Sexual assault responses are generally lacking.
- There needs to be a designated central coordinator to focus on solutions to these issues. Part of their job should be to receive this feedback from community members when issues arise.
- There needs to be a specialized team for sexual assaults
- Counselling is needed as part of immediate response.
- We heard that Victim Services in the Beau Del is doing really great work, working closely with the victims and people can rely on them.

- We also heard that Crown Prosecution Office has a new team that is researching and specializing in sexual violence.

RCMP

“We were expecting more from Justice and the RCMP. We assumed that we would be hearing about how our community are going to be working with Justice Canada and the RCMP to protect the children, women and children going forward. How will these recommendations lead to change? We need more step-by-step information about how we prevent this”.

Teet'lit Zheh (Fort McPherson)
GTC Annual General Assembly

- Many participants indicated that they would like communication with and responsiveness of the RCMP to improve.
 - Participants indicate that if you don't call the RCMP during working hours, you are redirected to Yellowknife. As one participant surmised: if you call afterhours you get “a complete stranger who doesn't know the community asking a bunch of questions and making assumptions”.
 - A participants asked if the RCMP can ensure that there is someone locally in each community that they can call. RCMP dispatch processes in the NWT need to be changed to be reflective of NWT realities, RCMP should answer in communities not Yellowknife which takes up valuable time.
 - There needs to be more continuity for families and communities because of the frequent turnover in RCMP officers and program staff turnover. This results in cases and families falling through the cracks.
 - There was a perception of the RCMP needing to be more compassionate, not giving the impression of caring or investing much effort in finding missing persons or to solve cases involving Indigenous people.
- There should be an emphasis on RCMP attracting more indigenous members to the force.
- Participants also indicated that they like when the RCMP asks community members to help.
- One recommendation was for a website to provide all information related to emergency procedures, provide updates in cases of emergencies such as Amber Alerts, that also has other information related to programs to support victims and families, and to instruct on procedures such as how to call a lawyer, apply for an emergency protection order, initiate searches, and provide information to the police.
- There was also discussion about the need for the RCMP to build greater relationships with local leadership and communities. The completion of community safety plans was highlighted as an important tool for priority setting and relationships at the local level.
- We heard a lot about the need for more transparency and collaboration when it comes to cases involving missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls.
 - There is a desire for the RCMP to initiate a working group for MMIWG that involves the RCMP, people with lived experience, youth, and Elders as well as the GNWT departments of Education, Justice (including Victims Services), Health and Social Services, people with lived experience, RCMP to identify and prioritize wrap around services to families and children dealing with loss and trauma.

- There should also be an audits/review of RCMP cold case files that reopens/re-examines cases with new technology and provides families proper updates on status of cases.
- A cold case team should be created, a 3rd party oversight body to ensure investigations are done properly, managed by objective and independent members.
- There is a perception that Justice and the RCMP close files too fast and don't give cases the rigor required. A participant asked why when ideas come in from family, why are they not all followed up on?
- It was also noted that families were receiving inadequate updates on open MMIWG case, just getting the same photocopied RMCP report mailed repeatedly, no updates marked on it, no recent activity.
- High profile cases involving missing or murdered Indigenous women that received lots of media attention were brought up by participants as indication that the RCMP lacked compassion or mishandled cases.

Human Security

Amber Alerts

- There was discussion about the use of Amber Alerts – emergency broadcasts (sent out on cellphones, television, and radio) that police can activate when a child is abducted and at risk of harm. Participants indicated a desire for the NWT to have separate notifications to help find missing Indigenous people whose disappearance doesn't fit the criteria for an Amber Alert.
 - We heard from participants that Amber Alerts don't often get issued for indigenous kids and referencing the case of missing 5-year-old Frank Young at Red Earth Cree Nation in Alberta. In this case RCMP indicated that the case did not meet the criteria for an Amber Alert. Participants indicated that this was an example of the system not serving the needs of Indigenous people.
 - We need our own legislation for Amber Alerts that apply to missing indigenous children, not the subscribed set of eligibility criteria that never seem to apply.
 - There should be policy transparency around why searches are called off.
 - Search and rescue should be done in a quick and coordinated approach, calling off should only be done when body is found, or when RCMP and the family are satisfied that the investigation and search was as thorough as possible, that it was documented and done methodically.

Safety

“Enough of sweeping everything under the rug, silence, pretending if you don’t say anything for long enough, everyone will just forget”

- Kát’odeeche First Nation Open House

- There was discussion on how the normalization of violence against women seems to be lessening; community members are less tolerant and more apt to step in when they see or know that violence is happening.
- However, it was recognized that we need more awareness, MMIWG is not just a southern problem, it is here too. Indigenous women are targeted and vulnerable and there is importance of raising awareness, getting people to talk, and dealing with lateral violence.
 - Communities want a say when returning ex-cons to their home communities.
 - Court notification should be provided to the public when offenders are being released from court and when they are coming to court from another community and/or from jail.
 - Emergency Protection Order breaches need to be taken more seriously and stronger consequences need to be applied when they are breached.
 - There needs to be free access to information when it comes to domestic violence or child protection issues.
 - Also, needs to be a support person in the community that is knowledgeable in family court proceedings.
 - Women should be able to carry concealed bear spray for protection.
 - “There is sex trafficking in the communities, but no one wants to talk about it”

- The adoption of **Clare's law** (also known as right to ask, right to know legislation) in the NWT was also discussed.

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, also known as **Clare's Law**, is currently available in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Newfoundland and Labrador. It is intended to reduce intimate partner violence. Domestic partners can fill out a Clare's Law application for a history of their partner's relationship violence. There is no charge for the information. Police can disclose allegations, convictions, and even peace bonds (also known as restraining or protection orders) from jurisdictions across Canada. Contact with police that didn't lead to arrest or charges can also be shared.***

- A participant indicated that this type of law may not be useful in a small community where everyone knows everyone.

Media

- Media issues were also raised in the engagement. There are Calls for Justice that are directed at the media and it is something that communities want to see movement on.
 - Comments included that media (e.g., journalists, broadcasters) can sensationalize and reinforce stereotypes and the media should do a better job at telling the real story without emphasis on side issues. To get to the point, not use diluted language, making it sound not as bad as it is, and provide faster and wider coverage in communities.
 - Indigenous languages need to be used in media so Elders can get the news too.
 - We should be using media to educate the public and tell stories of survivors.
 - The crisis and inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the residential schools and other historical traumatic events need to be made into documentaries to raise awareness.

Housing

- There is a housing crisis in the NWT that directly impacts the safety of women and girls. More housing is needed in the community. Discussion focused on rental housing, shelters, and seniors.
 - Need for cultural sensitivity training for the landlords
 - Needs for rental caps or limits on rental increases, issue of siding with landlords, supplements for rents seem to allow greater rental increases and no benefit to the renter.
 - There is a perceived devaluing of renters who receive the supplement
 - Seniors should be supported to do repairs to their housing.
 - Increase number of shelters, do away with cap on number of days they can stay, do away with age limit on sons allowed at shelters, this leaves women in a vulnerable position.

Barriers to Accessing Programs

- Communities identified barriers to accessing programs that put women and girls at risk and a factor that can lead to crime.
 - It is overwhelming for those fleeing family violence to get help, to set up on their own. This is often the reason survivors don't leave.
 - There is a need for a service to help those fleeing violence to walk them through the process and help with funding a new home and accessing available programs. Income assistance does not have this type of funding.
 - Food insecurity was raised as an issue. When food prices are raised, food insecurity leads to at risk women, and needed items like Ensure (drink) for sick family members or formula for babies is too high to be able to secure it.

- There is also need for accessibility transportation in all communities. It was brought up that there were no taxis in Tulita, and if Elders were to attend that they have to find their own ride.
- Participants noted that government red tape is a problem, there is too much bureaucracy, it takes too long to act, too many policies and rules, act as barriers to action.
 - Funding sources are too hard to access, the application processes are unreasonable and hard to understand. Applications keep getting sent back and need more information, too onerous. Government is dictating parameters when they should be seeking to help.
 - Government services are working in silos and seem to be actively working against innovative ideas, there needs to be more flexibility in the funding criteria, the application process, and an effort by government to match their funding with the needs of those who are vulnerable not the other way around.
 - There also needs to be consideration of front-line service workers to ensure they are supported and not expected to do the side of the desk work. There were concerns with community staff burnout.
 - Open House participants had not heard of the office of the NWT Ombudsman and recommended there be more awareness built in communities. This independent office investigates complaints from people who feel they have been treated unfairly by territorial organizations and recommends solutions to improve government services.
 - The GNWT should use interagency collaboration to conduct program information sessions/workshops in communities to increase community involvement in program use.
- Treatment for addictions was brought up as a much-needed response to the Calls for Justice.
 - There were repeated calls for an addiction treatment center located in the north.
 - More research needs to be done on how Indigenous people deal with trauma.
 - We heard that in some cases there are local counsellors available, but not many people know about it. There need to be more efforts made to promote local counsellors and connect people with these services
 - Currently there is too much focus on addictions when the real focus needs to be on trauma – make trauma treatment local and accessible by all.
 - There were concerns that there is a 6-month preparation before someone can get sent for addictions treatment in the south.
 - Participants also indicated that front line service providers need to receive training on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder as well as trauma informed service delivery. This knowledge is essential, and both need to be integrated into all interactions with the public and into all programs delivered.

Domestic Violence Programming

- Communities were aware that most of the RCMP call outs are for domestic violence situations.
- Most participants in the engagement were unaware of the existence of any specialized courts and questioned whether the RCMP were aware. They suggested that the program complete outreach and information sessions with the RCMP.
- Communities indicated that there should be local involvement in the referral process to specialized courts.

- There was interest in hosting Planning Action Responsibility Toward Non-Violent Empowered Relationships (PARTNER) program sessions with the RCMP in some communities especially smaller ones with more local/community involved detachments. Other programming and workshops should also be offered in the smaller communities.

The Domestic Violence Treatment Option (DVTO) Court is an alternative court for people who have been charged with violence against their partner and/or spouse. Participants receive support and counselling to address emotional and psychological causes of domestic violence. Participants of the DVTO enter a specialized 8-week **Planning Action Responsibility Toward Non-Violent Empowered Relationships (PARTNER)** program that requires participants to commit to 2-hours of mixed-gender group meetings per week. The program is currently delivered in Yellowknife, Hay River, and Behchokò.***

- There were comments regarding accessing domestic violence support funding through income assistance not being easy, there being too much of an onus put on the survivor to provide letters of substantiation and proof. Advocates such as Victims Services the YWCA feel like they have to put up a fight (with income assistance).

Roads

- Several engagement sessions included discussion on concerns with new roads into the communities including a proposed road to Tulita from Norman Wells, the greater proposed Mackenzie Valley Highway, and the new all-season road to Whatì.
- Safety is the primary concern with new roads as they offer more opportunity for bootlegging and drugs.
- There are no resident RCMP in many of the communities and also the fear of retribution if people report bootleggers or drug dealers.

Alcohol and Drugs

The night before one of the Open Houses, a young Indigenous woman was beaten up so badly by other young Indigenous women that she had to be medevaced out - drugs and alcohol were involved. Those people who attended the Open House noted that this has become normalized in the community.

- There was a clear concern about too much alcohol and drugs in the small communities.
- There was discussion of not enough reference in the Draft Action Plan regarding alcohol and drugs, and services to address addiction, community programs and supports.
 - Communities need support for dealing with the amount of drug dealers and bootleggers in the community.
 - There needs to be help for those who are offending, as well as more victim support, and accountable justice sentences.
 - Safe houses are needed in the communities, drug use is escalating and has become much worse than booze.

Going Forward

The Gender Equity Division, in partnership with the Native Women's Association of the NWT, will host a Men's Sharing Circle. The purpose of the workshop is to give men an opportunity to discuss their role and solutions in addressing Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The workshop will provide an opportunity for men to hear about the work being done by the Native Women's Association of the NWT to end violence against women; to receive an update from the GNWT on actions to address the 231 Calls for Justice, and to find a safe space for men to share and discuss what can be done to address the root causes of violence against women and girls. A report will be prepared on the outcome of this Gathering.

As noted above, no specific changes were recommended on the Draft Action Plan during the community engagement process. As a result, only minor changes will be made to the Draft Action Plan before it is finalized. However, this does not mean that the comments and concerns shared by community residents, as noted above, will not be acted on. Some of these concerns may already be addressed through a specific proposed action. If not, there will be other opportunities and activities to address those concerns. For example,

some of the concerns raised can be addressed in the development of the Family Violence Strategy which the Gender Equity Division is currently working on.

The anticipated endorsement and approval of the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence (NAP GBV) will also provide other opportunities to address the concerns raised during the community engagement process. The NAP GBV is on the agenda for the upcoming Federal/Provincial/Territorial Annual Meeting of Ministers of the Status of Women in early November. Once the NAP GBV has been approved, the GNWT will begin working with departments on developing an implementation plan. Funding to support the implementation of the NAP GBV is expected to be provided by the Federal Department of Women and Gender Equality beginning in 2023.

Once the MMIWG Action Plan has been finalized and approved, the departments will begin working on implementing the Actions. It should be noted that some of the actions are already being worked on and will be reported on in the MMIWG annual report in June.

Conclusion

Traveling into the communities to do the presentations and host the Open Houses provided the Gender Equity Division team with an opportunity to connect with community residents and to hear about what's happening in the north and to hear the concerns community residents have with what's happening in their communities and in the territories. It would be easy to become overwhelmed with the enormity of the concerns raised but at the same time, it was encouraging to see the efforts being made by community groups and by individuals to improve the lives of northerners. These efforts should be supported and applauded.

The Gender Equity Division would like to extend its' appreciation to those communities that welcomed us into their communities. The warm hospitality extended to the team was very much appreciated.

The Gender Equity Division team was thanked many times for getting this conversation started at the community level so let's keep that conversation going.



