

Reconciliation with Indigenous Women

CHANGING THE STORY OF MISSING AND MURDERED
INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS (2020)



Ontario Native Women's Association



“Everyday is ceremony.”

Maria Linklater (She Is Wise, 2019)

The Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA) would like to acknowledge all the courageous Indigenous women who spoke out on the violence they experienced, shared their stories about their families or lost loved ones, and bravely brought this issue to the forefront. We admire these women for their tireless grassroots efforts no matter how often they thought they were unheard. Much of the work of sharing stories, voices, and raising awareness outside of the National Inquiry was done without recognition or funding. Despite these challenges, Indigenous women continued to do the work.

Without the kindness and love of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and healers who carried and supported Indigenous women throughout the process, the work could not have been completed. They reminded us to care for each other while we do the work because it is heavy and hard. Helpers reminded us that the way forward is through ceremony. Ceremony is a way that families find the healing needed to cope with the loss of their loved ones and honour the lives that have gone on. For many Indigenous peoples, ceremony is the answer to their many questions. The way we become whole again is by participating in ceremony to activate our healing journey from the historical and ongoing trauma rooted in violence against Indigenous women.

We want to acknowledge the many unrecognized Indigenous women leaders who guided us to this point to develop a National Action Plan that addresses the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

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Introduction

This report embodies critical recommendations that must be integrated into the National Action Plan to address violence against Indigenous women and girls. ONWA's membership resolutions, several key reports, and a range of engagements, community submissions, and programs that address ending violence against Indigenous women and girls inform the recommendations. This report is a summary of over 5,700 women, over 50 years, who have spoken to ONWA specifically on the issue of violence against Indigenous women.

We begin our contribution for change by acknowledging the voices and work of the Indigenous women who walked alongside ONWA throughout decades to help inform reports and create and maintain many successful gender-based, culturally-grounded, and trauma-informed programs and services.

ONWA bases its expertise on Indigenous women and girls' lived experiences. ONWA's intersectional approach recognizes the many identities

of Indigenous women including woman-identified trans and Two-Spirit women disproportionately impacted by violence. We see evidence that other factors disproportionately impact Indigenous women including disability, mental health, and racialization. Our key understanding is that Indigenous women have been targeted and lived lives of individual and systemic violence in Canada. The normalization of violence must stop.

While everyone is part of the solution, the work must begin and end with Indigenous women and girls. Indigenous women are the experts on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We must have autonomy to determine solutions.

While we understand that ending the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls involves more than just Indigenous women, we recognize that the National Action Plan must be centered on actions/solutions aimed at addressing the roots of current patriarchal systems and ideologies. Entrenched patriarchal systems target and oppress Indigenous women and girls based on their identity as Indigenous women. When Indigenous women do not assume a leadership role in this work we perpetuate the actual belief systems that we need to dismantle. Indigenous women need not only be part of the solution; we *are* the solution to restoring balance in our families and communities.

Indigenous women need to be the focus of and the agents of the actions in the National Action Plan for many reasons:

- We cannot restore Indigenous women's health and well-being without listening to

and being directed by Indigenous women as to what causes harm in their lives.

- We cannot restore Indigenous families without restoring Indigenous women's roles as mothers.
- We cannot restore our communities, Nations, and broader societies that normalized violence against Indigenous women and girls by using the same colonized institutions and practices like a patriarchal belief system that created or contributed to the violence.
- We cannot listen to and continue to direct investments to organizations and institutions that have not built their strategies based on listening to Indigenous women and girls.

Building on Indigenous women's voices and work, ONWA's report informs the federal and Ontario governments on the critical information, actions, and recommendations that must be integrated into the National Action Plan to address violence against Indigenous women and girls. ONWA expects the National Action Plan to address Indigenous women's issues and gender-based violence while including supports and solutions for Indigenous women to restore their balance and take up their roles and responsibilities in families, communities, and Nations.

Indigenous women are at the centre of our families and communities. We need to be at the centre of the National Action Plan.



Laying the Foundation

ONWA is a provincial Indigenous women’s organization that engages with Indigenous women, their families, and communities throughout the province of Ontario since 1971.

In 1971, when ONWA was formed, First Nation women had just received the right to vote 10 years earlier in Canada. Residential schools were still open. Ontario Indigenous women had gone through the 1960s where over 20,000 of their children were taken by child welfare and adopted out.

By the time ONWA formed, thousands of First Nation women had lost their status as Indians because they loved and married a non-Indigenous man. One of ONWA’s past presidents, Jeanette Corbierre Lavell, went to the Supreme Court to fight the injustice. It was only in 2019 that the federal government ended sex discrimination in the Indian Act.

These examples display the systemic racism that leads to the ongoing systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls. There is a tendency to reduce violence against Indigenous women to an individual act by an individual person. It is so

much more than that. Society and institutions reinforce that Indigenous women do not have equal value or any value.

In the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, ONWA started discussions about Missing and Murdered Indigenous mothers, sisters, aunties, cousins and daughters. Public institutions including police, community leaders, and politicians displayed a lack of interest to address the issue. With the Native Women’s Association of Canada, ONWA went to the United Nations in 2004 to ask for action from Canada.

By 2015 when the National Inquiry was launched, ONWA had led five Summits to End Violence Against Indigenous Women, released two studies on the depth and breadth of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Ontario, and completed studies on different forms of violence including Human Trafficking of Indigenous women and girls.

For over 50 years, ONWA learned that when Indigenous women speak about what is really going on in their lives, in their children’s lives, and in their communities, it is Indigenous women who listen. We submit our recommendations based on knowledge from listening to individual and collective stories of women including stories from ONWA staff and board members who spoke of sisters, mothers and cousins lost to them.

ONWA has 50 years of lessons learned and solutions **not** invested in by multiple levels of government. One lesson we learned was that violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada is systemic and perpetuated by systems intended to serve them and by communities meant to protect them.

The engagements, partnerships, and reports that ONWA has engaged in provide us with a deep knowledge base in which our recommendations on the National Action Plan are grounded. ONWA believes it is vital that Indigenous women’s voices be heard. It is essential to have their input reflected in the discussions and recommendations put forth in the report.

Our recommendations for the National Action Plan are based on Indigenous women’s lived experience of what support really looks like for Indigenous women, their families, and communities.

A focus on ending violence against Indigenous women as a cornerstone of ONWA has remained since the 1970’s. Without safety, women cannot move forward in their lives.



Ontario Native Women's Association

ONWA is a membership organization that encompasses either Chapters or Councils in the province of Ontario. Being a membership organization means that ONWA provides Indigenous women pathways for support, capacity building, and development opportunities to collectively influence both national and provincial policies and legislation. ONWA communicates with our Indigenous women’s Chapters and Councils on pertinent issues impacting Indigenous women. This occurs through our Annual General Assembly (AGA), resolutions put forward annually at the AGA, and through membership engagements. ONWA frequently hosts community engagements on program design, development, and feedback on implementation to have living programs that respond to Indigenous women’s needs.

Indigenous Women's Frameworks for Knowing and Being



ONWA developed frameworks based on Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous women's lived experiences. The frameworks are based on how Indigenous women describe their own ways of knowing and being. We provide three frameworks that inform the recommendations we offer for the National Action Plan.

The first framework is ONWA's Theory of Change which recognizes that Indigenous women are experts in their lives and know the solutions to issues we experience.

The second framework is ONWA's Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis (IGBA) which recognizes that constructs of Indigenous women in Canada, a country built on colonization, reduces Indigenous women to victims and never builds them as leaders in their lives, their families, communities or Nations. Applying an intersectional framework, we realize that Indigenous women occupy multiple social identities; some that negatively impact Indigenous women's lives directly influencing the level of violence we experience.

The third framework is She is Wise which positions Indigenous women's knowledge and practices in an understanding of Indigenous women's leadership. It provides guidance to define policy and deliver programs that support Indigenous women's experiences and moves Indigenous women into their leadership roles.

We developed the frameworks with trusted Knowledge Keepers.

ONWA's Theory of Change

ONWA's Theory of Change recognizes the work Indigenous women undertake is rooted in the personal and reflects issues we face daily. Patriarchy and colonialism impacted Indigenous women resulting in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' tragedy. ONWA's Theory of Change frames our work around Indigenous women's safety, security, and success.

ONWA's Theory of Change is based in community development with an underlying principle that Indigenous women are the foundation of strong communities and nations. ONWA supports Indigenous women to take their leadership roles in their lives and communities.

ONWA works with Indigenous women to change the narrative of Indigenous women's stories, to acknowledge who we are and how we are viewed, and to expand their stories to show the resiliency and strengths in their lives.

ONWA's foundation is Indigenous women. ONWA works with Indigenous women wherever we live in Ontario: urban, rural, or remote areas. We work with other Indigenous women's organizations, with women's groups in First Nations' communities, and through partnerships with organizations that support Indigenous women.

We provide opportunities for Indigenous women to build bundles for their leadership journeys. By creating healing spaces for Indigenous women to transform their lives from crisis to strong identities, we are better able to recognize trauma in themselves and others and learn healthy coping mechanisms. In doing so, Indigenous women can lead in their own lives and move to a place of well-being.

ONWA staff, the Council, and Chapters as helpers are also leaders that share Indigenous women's voices. ONWA supports Indigenous women on their life journeys and amplifies their voices to address systemic issues we face every day.

ONWA's Theory of Change is foundational for moving towards Indigenous women successfully holding the world together for themselves and their families. The Theory of Change is the base which the Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis and the She Is Wise Framework stand upon.

Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis

ONWA's Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis (IGBA) offers a lens through which Indigenous women's lived experiences are viewed. It is a tool to see the colonial systems Indigenous women navigate every day and to highlight the unique experiences Indigenous women have when navigating those systems. When we have applied an Indigenous Gender Based analysis to the Indian Act, it showed not only the impact on Indigenous women but also that the impact was sex discrimination.

IGBA looks beyond one view while acknowledging intersectionalities that compound Indigenous women's experiences. We focus on Indigenous women's systemic experiences to identify where change needs to happen. With input at every level, Indigenous women develop effective policies for change. A shift in practices better supports their lives when Indigenous women's voices are included in policy development.

IGBA requires us to question how a program decision or policy impacts Indigenous women. It requires that we think about *who are the community members accessing our programs*. What do we need to do so they have everything they need to participate in the programs? Do the programs support what Indigenous women need?

IGBA requires that we do not assume Indigenous women are all the same. We recognize Indigenous women are uniquely different. Using a generic approach or expecting everyone to be the same is not respectful. An intersectional approach recognizes systems like patriarchy and colonialism harm people. Each woman is unique

This graphic is a representation of the 28 systems and our roles and responsibilities based on teachings from the turtle.



with multiple aspects to her identity and each identity point defines how systems will treat her. Each woman has been given her fire (purpose) from Creator that helps to navigate her life and assume her leadership role. For many Indigenous women, the fire has been denied, belittled or ignored. At ONWA, we acknowledge an Indigenous woman's spirit that holds her resiliency and strength.

ONWA's IGBA provides a deeper understanding of issues facing Indigenous women and the multiple systems we navigate. ONWA identified 28 systems from listening to Indigenous women as the experts in their lives. All of the systems have embedded systemic racism and perpetuate violence against Indigenous women.

ONWA does not claim to be an expert in these areas. We know that with an IGBA application, more work and research is needed in all system areas.

The 28 Systems are:

- Child Welfare
- Education for Indigenous Women
- Food Security
- Homeless and Housing
- Transportation
- Employment
- Healthcare
- Lifelong Care
- Disability
- Legal Systems
- Land
- Indian Act Governance
- Culture
- Spirituality
- Family Structure
- Education for our Children
- Income Security
- Media and Social Media
- Childcare
- Economic Development
- Birthing
- Mental Health
- Social Services
- Justice
- Water
- Indigenous Governance
- Language
- Gender Identity

IGBA is based on the teachings of the turtle.

It starts with an understanding that we are ALWAYS moving in a direction – forward, backwards or sideways. When we are in balance as Indigenous women, we can be guided by Creator and culture.

The turtle's head represents Creator's purpose for us. Every Indigenous woman has a purpose and gifts to fulfill that purpose. The turtle's tail represents community needs. Each Indigenous woman is intended to use her gifts to contribute to her community's restoration and maintenance of balance.

The turtle's feet represent the four roles Indigenous women need to maintain:

- Self – Our role as strong and healthy Indigenous women in the world.
- Family – Our role to restore and maintain a strong and healthy Indigenous family.
- Community – Our gifts and skills to rebuild and restore Indigenous communities. Our organizations can sometimes be our community.
- Nation – Our gifts and skills to rebuild and restore Nations (Indigenous, First Nation, Provincial, National)

The turtle's shell represents the 13 Grandmother Moons, each moon corresponding with a key recommendation.

ONWA's IGBA is built from an analysis of existing anti-violence work ONWA undertook over the last 50 years. It is designed to identify and eliminate factors that create any form of violence against Indigenous women.

Gender Identity – Learning with Humility

She is Wise Framework

The She is Wise framework recognizes Indigenous women as experts in their lives. It's grounded within a need to create space for Indigenous women to reclaim and restore their roles and leadership. An important aspect of this concept is relationship-building rooted in healing and grounded in healthy, safe Indigenous lifeways of knowing, being, and doing in our roles and leadership as Indigenous women.

The collective space—created by ONWA through programs, gatherings and summits—is where Indigenous women share their life journeys forming the knowledge that informed the She is Wise Framework. The knowledge is shared in ceremony, storytelling, story sharing, feasts, gatherings, and other traditional engagements.

In the framework, Indigenous women learn to acknowledge their gifts that appear on their journey. Gifts can be defined as their lived experiences making them experts on topics related to Indigenous women in Canadian society. Gifts connect them to who we are, to their ancestral lines, to the land, and to Creator. The She is Wise Framework reflects them as women, family, community, and nation; and most importantly, as helpers.

The She is Wise Framework is an example of gendered Indigenous methodologies, approaches, and knowledges grounded in stories and lived

experiences shared by Indigenous women and communities. The She is Wise Framework builds on the shared Indigenous women's stories. It positions women as experts in their own lives essential to inform research, strategies, initiatives, and programs specific to them.

ONWA uses the She Is Wise Framework to develop programs and services. ONWA is dedicated to expanding the She is Wise Framework to meet the unique needs of Indigenous women and girls. It is from the framework that other work like the annual She is Wise conference springs. ONWA conducts a research project and utilizes province-wide engagements to inform the Framework scheduled for release in 2025.

Indigenous Women's Frameworks for Knowing and Being

The ONWA Theory of Change, Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis, and the She is Wise Framework centralize Indigenous women's lived experiences. The Theory of Change is a foundation that supports Indigenous women to hold their world together. The Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis is a place that recognizes systems Indigenous women navigate. The She is Wise Framework is a bundle that supports the work needing to be done by and for Indigenous women.

We live in an exciting time in the evolution of human rights in Canada. The addition of 2SLGBTQ+ to the focus of the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls led to important discussions on gender identity and sexual orientation.

As the term "Two-Spirit" began to be used, many community members did not understand what it meant due to the erasure of the existence and roles of Two-Spirit people in Indigenous communities.

Through conversations with Indigenous women at ONWA, we continue to learn and grow our understandings of gender identity and sexual orientation. Our research shows how Indigenous communities understand there are more than two genders as Two-Spirit people are recognized and honoured for their gifts. Historically, Two-Spirit people held positions as advisors, healers, and leaders. Two-spirit people have roles and responsibilities and their own ceremonies.

Colonialism introduced patriarchy and normalized violence to those that did not conform to Western binaries of gender: male and female. Colonial violence forced Two-Spirit people into hiding. As Two-Spirit people went underground so did teachings of their roles and responsibilities.

As Two-Spirit people became oppressed and devalued, they were often met with violence and murder. As Two-Spirit people reconnect with their inherent roles and responsibilities and take up leadership positions, they bring forward their experiences of oppression.

Today, Two-Spirit people are Indigenous people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, other gendered, and third/ fourth gendered individuals. It is important to note that not every Indigenous person who identifies as LGBTQ will use the term Two-Spirit, and not everyone who uses the term Two-Spirit will identify as LGBTQ. Some people use Two-Spirit to distance themselves from colonial society. Others identify with a nation-specific term as many Indigenous languages have words for gender diversity. Two-Spirit takes on a different meaning for different people. Some Indigenous people use Two-Spirit as a way to identify sexual orientation while others use it to explain transgender identity. (The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity.)

ONWA is inclusive of people who self identify as Indigenous women.



Teachings

Indigenous people have original knowledge based on Indigenous worldviews. The responsibility for passing on that knowledge often rests with Indigenous women. Recommendations for the National Action Plan are respectfully placed in the 13 Grandmother Moons Teachings to remind us of our responsibilities through an Indigenous ethical framework. For Indigenous women to thrive, we must always be mindful of honouring our connections to Creation, self, and others by upholding teachings and ceremonies.

Recommendations

For decades now, ONWA has worked to end violence against Indigenous women. Our recommendations are well-informed, prioritize the health, safety, and well-being of Indigenous women and their families, and seek to ensure that no additional harms will come to Indigenous women.

The recommendations were developed by combining research, community submissions, and ONWA's expertise.

At many of ONWA's gatherings, including the annual She is Wise conference, Indigenous women are asked to answer a question through painting on a rock. The rock symbolizes the strength of Mother Earth that Indigenous women can draw on at all times. These images represent some of the other strengths that Indigenous women have.

"I do not have one clear answer to solve this major issue but I have some ideas that may lead to change. I believe we need to work on healing traumas at the community and individual levels as I mentioned before. I believe we need to connect more through traditions and ceremonies. As an off-reserve, urban Native, I have had little exposure to my own community and traditions. We need to take care of each other off-reserve or on reserve and advocate for each other. We need to be each other's sources of strength. I believe we should keep fighting for awareness, exposure, and investigations into these MMIWG. We cannot stop fighting for injustices. We can also continue to bring exposure to these injustices by doing what we are already doing. By creating art, stories, and advocating for rights on social media and other types of media."

(Community Submission, 2018)

January, Spirit Moon

The first moon of Creation is Spirit Moon. Spirit Moon manifests through the Northern Lights. It honours the silence and realizes our place within all of Great Mystery's creatures.



“Safety looks like a whole community caring for Indigenous women, loving Indigenous women, uplifting their voices, protecting their children, educating their children, feeding their children. Safety looks like love multiplied. Safety is found at the end of colonial violence. Let’s stop the violence, the trauma. Let the women lead.”

(Community-Based Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Submission, 2018)

1

The Safety of Indigenous Women Must be at the Centre of the National Action Plan

“When I look at my [autopsy] table, I know that I am four or five times more likely to be on there because I am an Indigenous woman.” *Ontario Coroner Kona Williams*

The reality of being an Indigenous woman is that we are 16 times more likely to be murdered than are non-Indigenous women.

Indigenous women deserve the right to be safe. Safety is a fundamental human right. The National Action Plan must focus on increasing safety for Indigenous women and girls and decreasing the levels of harm and violence directed at Indigenous women.

Indigenous women have known for centuries we are not safe. We know we have a right to safe spaces.

Fifteen years ago, Cindy Blackstock shared how Maslow’s hierarchy of needs was built on Blackfoot peoples’ teachings from the Prairies. ONWA often turns to the teachings when developing programs because without

establishing safety, Indigenous women and girls cannot move forward in their lives.

What does safety mean for Indigenous women and girls? As we asked the question throughout the years, we received numerous answers and learned of recurring themes.

1. Safe Public Spaces – Indigenous women and girls can access any public service or program and receive culturally-appropriate services by culturally-aware and respectful people.
2. Safe Homes - Domestic violence, sexual abuse, and sexual violence become absent from our homes.
3. Safe Families – The legacy of colonization is addressed and violence becomes non-existent in our familial relationships.

4. Safe Indigenous Identity – Indigenous women (regardless of status) are recognized in all appropriate legislation, policies, and communities.
5. Safe Communities – Indigenous women and girls can walk down the street and not be solicited, harassed, sexually assaulted, trafficked or propositioned.
6. Safe Relationships – Young Indigenous girls do not have to navigate sexual violence in their dating relationships. Indigenous women are able to role model what safe relationships look like.

In ONWA’s membership engagements throughout Ontario in 2018-2019, community members spoke of the numerous ways in which they are making strides in keeping themselves safe.... Across all sites, women spoke of the impact of different networks of support to create safety: community watches, Bear Clans, well-lit environments in communities, workshops to online safety for youth, awareness programming to teach about consent, campaigns to recognize the signs of exploitation and human trafficking, safety planning, VAW shelters, transitional housing and healing lodges. (ONWA, Membership Engagement Report, 2019, p. 21)

It is unacceptable that Indigenous women need to negotiate their safety to meet their basic needs.

Over the years, ONWA made recommendations regarding safety:

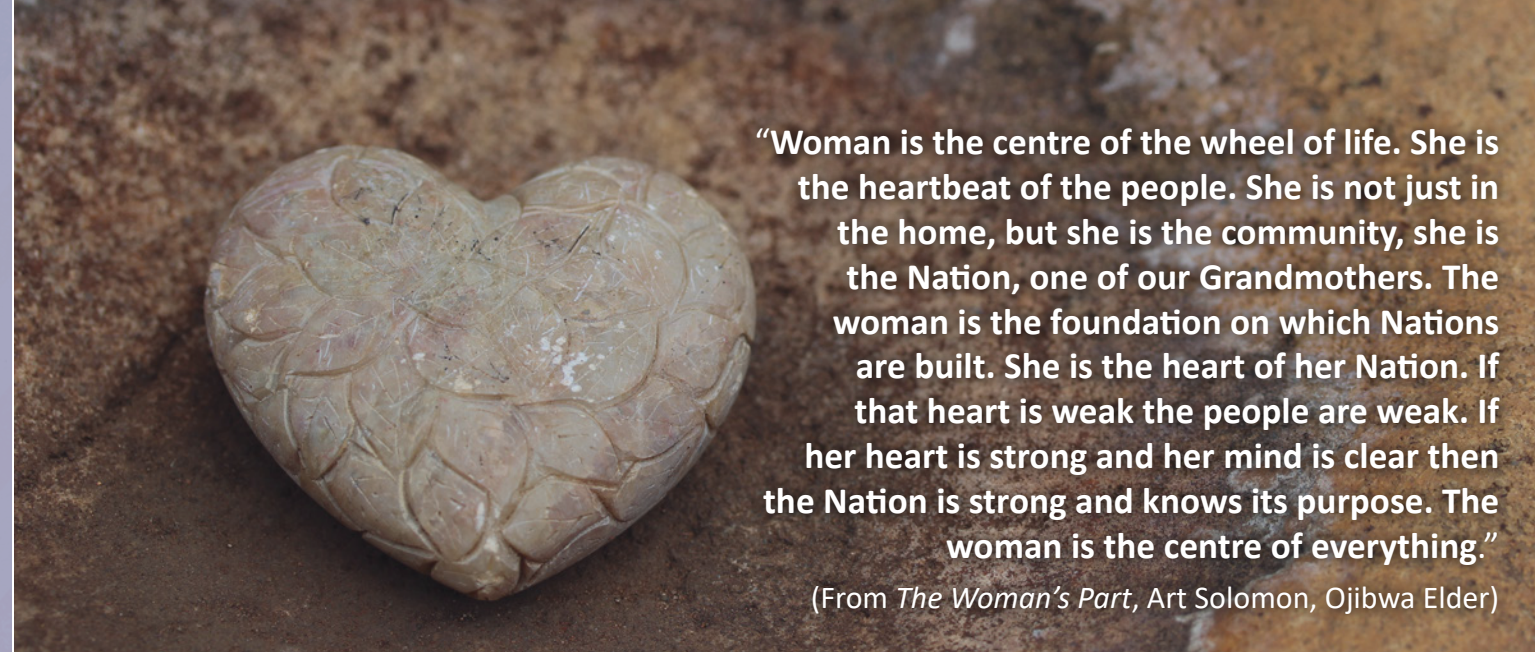
- The Breaking Free report (1989) spoke to the need for shelters for battered women, healing lodges, and community response teams. Thirty years later, the recommendations remain valid.
- The Journey to Safe Spaces report emphasizes a strategy for safe spaces for human trafficking Survivors. (2019)
- The ONWA National Inquiry Submission (2018) recommends “immediate and core funding of shelters and safe spaces for Indigenous women experiencing violence be implemented for all communities, including rural and remote communities.”

Recommended Action 1.1

The National Action Plan applies an Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis that ensures safety for Indigenous women and girls is at the focus of all investments through the Plan including measuring the current system’s safety levels and dismantling barriers or systems that cause harm.

February, Bear Moon

The second moon of Creation is Bear Moon. We honour the vision quest that begins in the fall. During this time, we discover how to see beyond reality and to communicate through energy rather than sound.



“Woman is the centre of the wheel of life. She is the heartbeat of the people. She is not just in the home, but she is the community, she is the Nation, one of our Grandmothers. The woman is the foundation on which Nations are built. She is the heart of her Nation. If that heart is weak the people are weak. If her heart is strong and her mind is clear then the Nation is strong and knows its purpose. The woman is the centre of everything.”

(From *The Woman's Part*, Art Solomon, Ojibwa Elder)

2

Centre the National Action Plan on Indigenous Women - Restore Indigenous Women's Roles and Responsibilities through the National Action Plan

The legacy of colonization disrupts, undermines, and ignores Indigenous women's roles and responsibilities. Colonization leaves Indigenous women and girls untethered from their identities, families, and communities. Patriarchal values replace Indigenous values. Colonization results in Indigenous women being spoken to, spoken for, and spoken about. The National Action Plan cannot repeat this pattern.

Indigenous women's voices and stories are silenced often because issues Indigenous people face are interconnected and overwhelming. Collectively, we have not been prepared to hear Indigenous women's voices. When Maria Campbell's book *Halfbreed* was first published in 1971, the publishers made the decision to remove part of her story – her

rape by an RCMP officer. It was only in 2018, with the re-issuing of her book, that her complete story could be told. Today, we have governments quick to dismiss notions that human trafficking exists in our communities because it's difficult to hear what Indigenous women and girls negotiate to survive. Will we have to wait another 50 years before we can hear the truth of Indigenous women's lives like we did for Maria Campbell's story?

Let us be clear. This is not the Plan to deal with the many issues impacting Indigenous people in Canada today. It is intended to look quite deliberately at how to end violence against Indigenous women and girls. We are struck by two significant points in the National Inquiry's evolution. We describe both as sincere and well-meaning but Indigenous women were moved from being at the conversation's centre.

- a) The addition of the 2SLGBTQ+ community members after year 2 of the National Inquiry. The 2SLGBTQ+ community faces violence and deserve to have a focus on how to address the issues. As the Inquiry applied an intersectional approach, our expectation was that all social locations would be considered when making recommendations, including the impact of racism, mental health and disability. Our expectation is that all social locations be considered when making recommendations.
- b) The description of the situation as “Genocide” when the final report was released. The recommendations to address genocide are so broad that it became impossible to define where to begin. The focus on the term genocide by the media reframed the discussion away from the basics – what do you need to do as an individual or as part of any public system and structure today to address violence against Indigenous women and girls?

The focus must remain on the needs as expressed by Indigenous women to address violence inflicted on them. This comes down to the legitimacy of voice for Indigenous women.

We know that well-meaning people step into the work to end violence against Indigenous women and girls. They can take up their appropriate space but shouldn't take up the space for Indigenous women who have worked with, advocated for, and been part of the journey to establish authentic voices for Indigenous women and girls at policy and decision-making tables.

It is critical to understand that Indigenous women's voices have been left out and silenced in conversations that impact their safety, well-being, and livelihood. Substantive and meaningful solutions cannot be put forward until the silencing of Indigenous women's voices is understood, addressed, and remedied.

We caution governments to not replicate processes steeped in colonization and patriarchy. The system of representation for Indigenous women was created by government to control Indigenous women and cannot continue as part of the Plan. As we work to end systemic racism, we have to deal with embedded beliefs that Indigenous women cannot speak for themselves. This requires a revisiting of the systems of representation that the federal government recognizes as legitimate voices for Indigenous women. (See our recommendations regarding Inherent Rights).



March, Sugar Moon

The third moon of Creation is the Sugar Moon. As the maple sap begins to run, we learn about one of the main medicines given to the Anishinaabe which balances our blood and heals us. During this time, we are encouraged to balance our lives as we would our blood levels by using Natural Law.



It requires resources, space, and time for the Indigenous women's movement in Canada to discuss who we want to represent us at policy and decision-making tables. ONWA starts from the position that Indigenous women can speak for themselves and do not need representative bodies to speak for them. We need processes that recognize and legitimize their voices.

When Indigenous women do want representation, Indigenous women need to decide who that organization or organizations will be. Today, a First Nation woman can have a relationship with her First Nation community, the urban Indigenous community she lives in, the Nation she belongs to, and women's organizations she belongs to. She may not have a connection to her First Nation but is represented by the Assembly of First Nations. The federal government is most comfortable funding Indigenous women's representation through male-dominated organizations, state constructed organizations or through partially-funded formulas.

Centering Indigenous women's voice in policy, programs, services, implementation plans, and funding frameworks that pertain to them is an absolute. We know that development of solutions by Indigenous women is a best practice because ONWA's service delivery

model was developed by Indigenous women and it works.

Canada could gain a tremendous understanding of Indigenous women's experiences by facilitating the voices and participation of Indigenous women. This means any provincial or federal legislation or policies developed for Indigenous people include formal engagement and representation of Indigenous women not only through national or provincial Indigenous organizations, but through how Indigenous women organize at community levels and who "Indigenous women identify as their representatives in Ontario."

Recommended Action 2.1

The federal government ensures full participation of Indigenous women and their organizations in all aspects of the development and implementation of the National Action Plan.

Recommended Action 2.2

The federal government invests in a national gathering where provincial, national, and local Indigenous women's organizations come together to provide advice and guidance on how Indigenous women want to see themselves represented and determine ways to support and sustain Indigenous women's voices into national policy and decision-making processes.

Invest in Indigenous Women and Our Organizations

What a society invests in tells us what is valued. ONWA was established in 1971 and has never received core funding from the federal government. What would Indigenous women's organizations and their capacity look like if we had been invested in by the federal government for 50 years?

We know that current structures and systems cannot effectively develop and implement solutions to end violence against Indigenous women and girls. They have not done so in the past and they do not understand the unique challenges of Indigenous women's lives.

Indigenous women and organizations lead the fight against Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls with little to no funding. Research, advocacy, media campaigns, and the profiling of families' stories led by Indigenous women's organizations, are the reasons why a National Inquiry was established. Indigenous women and Indigenous women's organizations already doing the work must be included in the investments that address the issues.

Constantly responding to Indigenous women's needs without core funding means that

Indigenous women's organizations are diverted away from capacity building and strategic and long-term thinking to respond to calls for funding, proposal, and report writing. Oftentimes, funding is inequitable. Organizations are forced to apply for short-term, project-based funding which is unsustainable.

Investments are needed in:

a) Core Funding for Indigenous Women's Organizations

Establishing core sustainable funding for Indigenous women's organizations means adequate funding that supports the building and maintenance of internal and external capacity, and successful service delivery. Core sustainable funding is necessary for internal development like leadership development and training for board governance and management. It is necessary for external capacity building and relationship maintenance.

b) **Prioritizing Programs and Services Identified by Indigenous Women and Girls**

Oftentimes, Indigenous women's agencies anti-violence work is part of other funded programs. At ONWA, much of the work on key safety issues for Indigenous women—child welfare, sexual violence, family violence, domestic violence, health, housing, justice, human trafficking and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls—is unfunded and done on top of our everyday work and through other programs.

c) **Capacity Building for Indigenous Women's Grassroots Organizations**

Severely underfunded grassroots Indigenous women's groups provide safe spaces where Indigenous women can comfortably disclose their lived experiences including the violence they have experienced. Safe spaces provide women with a place to heal, create safety plans, and most importantly, a space where we are supported and not judged.

Approaches to funding need to be re-examined. The federal government's move to a distinction-based approach with its nation-to-nation, Crown-to-Inuit, and government-to-government framework has removed Indigenous women's organizations from funding. The original framework did not recognize the 60-80% of Indigenous people who live in urban centers. The federal government sought to remedy that by flowing federal funding through friendship centres. Here again, Indigenous women were not recognized. The first round of implementation for the National Action Plan does not include an investment in Indigenous women's organizations. How can change happen if Indigenous women's organizations are not funded?

The current investment structure to Indigenous communities, both urban and on-reserve, does not have direct funding for Indigenous women's organizations including First Nation Women's Councils and Aboriginal shelters. Funding flows through distinction-based structures instead of upholding Indigenous women's autonomy.

Direct funding for Indigenous women's organizations including grassroots organizations is critical for communities to deliver services to Indigenous women. Direct funding for Indigenous women's organizations is essential to ensure the National Action Plan's success.

Recommended Action 3.1

Indigenous women's organizations receive direct and core sustainable funding to continue policy and systemic work to end violence against Indigenous women and to provide safe spaces for women and their families through services and programs.

Recommended Action 3.2

An Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis be undertaken on funding provided to Indigenous women's organization as compared to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations.



April, Sucker Moon

The fourth moon of Creation is Sucker Moon to illustrate when the sucker goes to the Spirit World to receive cleaning techniques for this world. When it returns to this realm, it purifies a path for the Spirits and cleanses all our water beings. During this time, we can learn to become healed healers.

Reclaim and Restore the Role of Indigenous Women as Mothers

4

When experts at MMIWG gatherings were asked what would be most the impactful action to stop MMIWG, one expert responded, "Restore Indigenous women's roles as mothers."

For Indigenous women, the child welfare system and the role of mother has become deeply interconnected. Indigenous women's motherhood roles have been disrupted by colonial policies. Child welfare continues to play a key role in undermining the ability of Indigenous women to raise their children.

We know that apprehension of children disrupts families and leads to poor mental health outcomes. Apprehension is often the first step to lower educational attainment and a pipeline to the criminal justice system. Apprehension disconnects Indigenous children from their cultures, languages, and communities. Being placed in care comes with far-reaching consequences that have negative impacts on children's abilities to thrive. (OHRC, 2018)

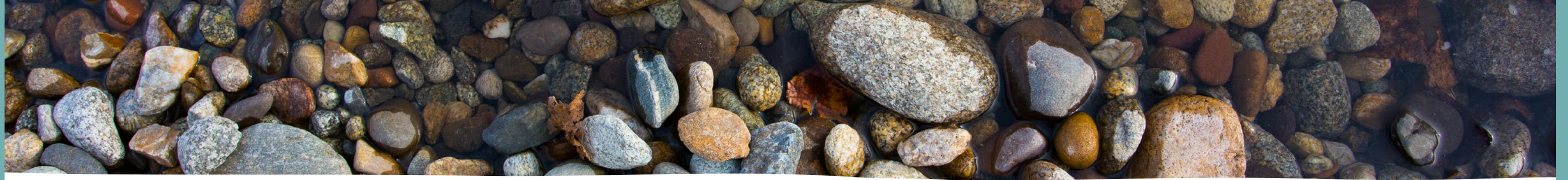
For mothers, involvement with the child welfare system and the suffering when a child is removed from her care creates fears that the system is

harmful, discriminatory, and does not meet their needs. (OHRC, 2018) We know that when Indigenous children are kept out of the child welfare system and the family structure is supported and invested in, we are more likely to thrive.

Restoring Indigenous women's motherhood means keeping children out of the child welfare system. It means ensuring the basic family needs such as housing, income security, and food security are met. It requires investing in Indigenous-led prevention services. A child welfare or child wellness system that does not include mothers does not address a root cause of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Every effort must be made to strengthen Indigenous families, keeping the bond between a mother and her child strong and whole because Indigenous women's resiliency includes her connection to her children.

Federal and provincial policy discussions around child welfare in the last two years has at times focused on jurisdiction and who



“owns” the child. The original bond between mother and child was not the priority in this conversation. Changes to the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA) in Ontario and C-92 has unintended consequences because Indigenous women were not at the table to negotiate on their own behalf.

ONWA has heard of situations where Indigenous mothers who had their children apprehended in a city were told their children were sent back to their First Nation community. In some cases, the children had never been to that community and did not know anyone there. In other cases, the mother left the community because of violence she experienced there as a child. When did the mother release her parental decision-making authority to a First Nation that may not be a safe place for her child?

ONWA advocates for critical changes that keep Indigenous children, youth, and families together and safe. We want the National Action Plan to provide investments in these areas:

- a) A prevention-based circle of care approach and co-development of plans of care while moving away from an involuntary, crisis response, apprehension model. This shift in practice could allow for a more trusting, collaborative relationship with service providers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) from the beginning while empowering Indigenous women, their families, and their communities to work together to care for their children.

- b) Due to intergenerational trauma and disruption of parenting bonds between mothers and children caused by residential schools, there is a pressing need for investments in parenting skills and restoring parent-child bonds through culture and ceremony.
- c) Increase the number of Indigenous family support workers. As system navigators, they can advocate for Indigenous families to address barriers like lack of transportation, lack of childcare, and fear of the pre/post-natal care system based on negative experiences in the health care system.
- d) Ensure expectant Indigenous mothers have access to prenatal services and Indigenous midwifery services at the onset of pregnancy.
- e) Increase professional education to child welfare and child well-being organizations grounded in Indigenous-specific, gender-based, and culturally relevant practices developed and delivered by Indigenous women.
- f) Community organizations recognized by mothers as their support should be involved in all Indigenous mothers’ family plans of care when any suspicion of risk arises or a need for support is identified. When an Indigenous child or youth comes into care, plans of care should be co-developed with an identified Indigenous service provider, the mother and/or the family. The plan must be clear with agreed upon objectives that are regularly discussed and directed by the Indigenous

child, youth, mother/family and anyone identified in the circle of care planning.

- g) Obligations of child welfare workers regarding their duty to report should be adjusted to include an alternative option of duty to refer which should be mandated in legislation. This helps eliminate birth alerts and lessens the need to signal investigations and apprehensions of Indigenous children and youth. This means that instead of issuing a birth alert or a call to a child welfare society for investigation, social services, health care, early childhood care and educational professionals have the option in non-life threatening circumstances (e.g. perceived neglect or poverty) to refer instead of report to child welfare agencies. Indigenous women should not have to choose between their safety or their children as duty to report are mandated against the victims of violence.

Many Indigenous service agencies across Ontario including ONWA provide wrap-around, culturally-grounded, trauma-informed supports and services for Indigenous women and families. The agencies should be contacted when an Indigenous mother needs support. If concerns arise or perceived neglect is noted, it is preventative services that should be engaged to assist.

Indigenous women’s organizations like ONWA provide preventative supports and services created and implemented for Indigenous women by Indigenous women. Increasing investment in Indigenous women’s agencies ensures that Indigenous mothers, families, and communities receive the supports we need in a flexible

manner, where and when we need them. With increased investment, risks are mitigated and outcomes are improved for Indigenous women, families, and their communities.

Recommended Action 4.1

Address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the care of child welfare agencies. A complete realignment of the child welfare system that provides Indigenous women and families with consistent early prevention, intervention, and wrap-around supports. Shift from risk and crisis responses to prevention and support services. The work currently done by the child welfare system be done with, or within, the Indigenous community.

Recommended Action 4.2

A committed long standing investment in community-based programs through Indigenous women’s organizations that supports and nurtures Indigenous women’s ability to mother and includes Indigenous parenting programs that span a child’s lifecycle, domestic violence programs that offer culturally-appropriate early intervention and prevention including healing programs and appropriate safety planning.

Recommended Action 4.3

Legislative changes to replace “duty to report” with a mandated “duty to refer” and an increase in relationships between health care providers and children’s aid societies with Indigenous service providers, such as ONWA, so Indigenous families improve outcomes and mitigate risks.

May, Flower Moon

The fifth moon of Creation is Flower Moon when plants display their Spirit sides for all the world to see. The life-giving energy is one of the most powerful healing medicines on Mother Earth. During this time, we are encouraged to explore our Spiritual essences.



*“After Healing
is Healthy Living”*

(Consultation on Sexual Violence
in the Aboriginal Community, 2011)



5

Invest in Healing

The National Action Plan must invest in best practices for healing of Indigenous women and girls who experience violence and must support the families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. ONWA goes even further to state that all Indigenous communities need healing programs and cultural healing practices until each Indigenous person and community in Canada is restored to balance.

ONWA recognizes that by providing Indigenous women, their families, and communities with safe, respectful spaces to honour and acknowledge their loved ones, we as a community create opportunities to heal. When we bring families together, it allows them to honour their loved ones and to work on their healing.

ONWA hosts an annual Honouring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Pow Wow in our Thunder Bay site. Indigenous women and community at a grassroots level lead the event. ONWA brings together survivors of violence and families of Missing

and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to sing, to dance, and to amplify their voices. We create the safe space to empower women to take back their roles as leaders and more importantly as medicine to heal themselves, their families, communities, and Nations.

Colonization robbed Indigenous women of their identities, purposes, and place. The wounds of violence directed at Indigenous women and witnessed by Indigenous women left many vulnerable.

ONWA supports the Aboriginal Healing Foundation’s practices and investments and found them to be the most impactful when working with Indigenous women and girls:

- a) An investment in Indigenous women’s organizations means an investment in healing from colonial violence, racialization, domestic and sexual violence, and from systemic violence. The first step in healing is to break the silence—to speak the truth of what you have experienced. Safe space for

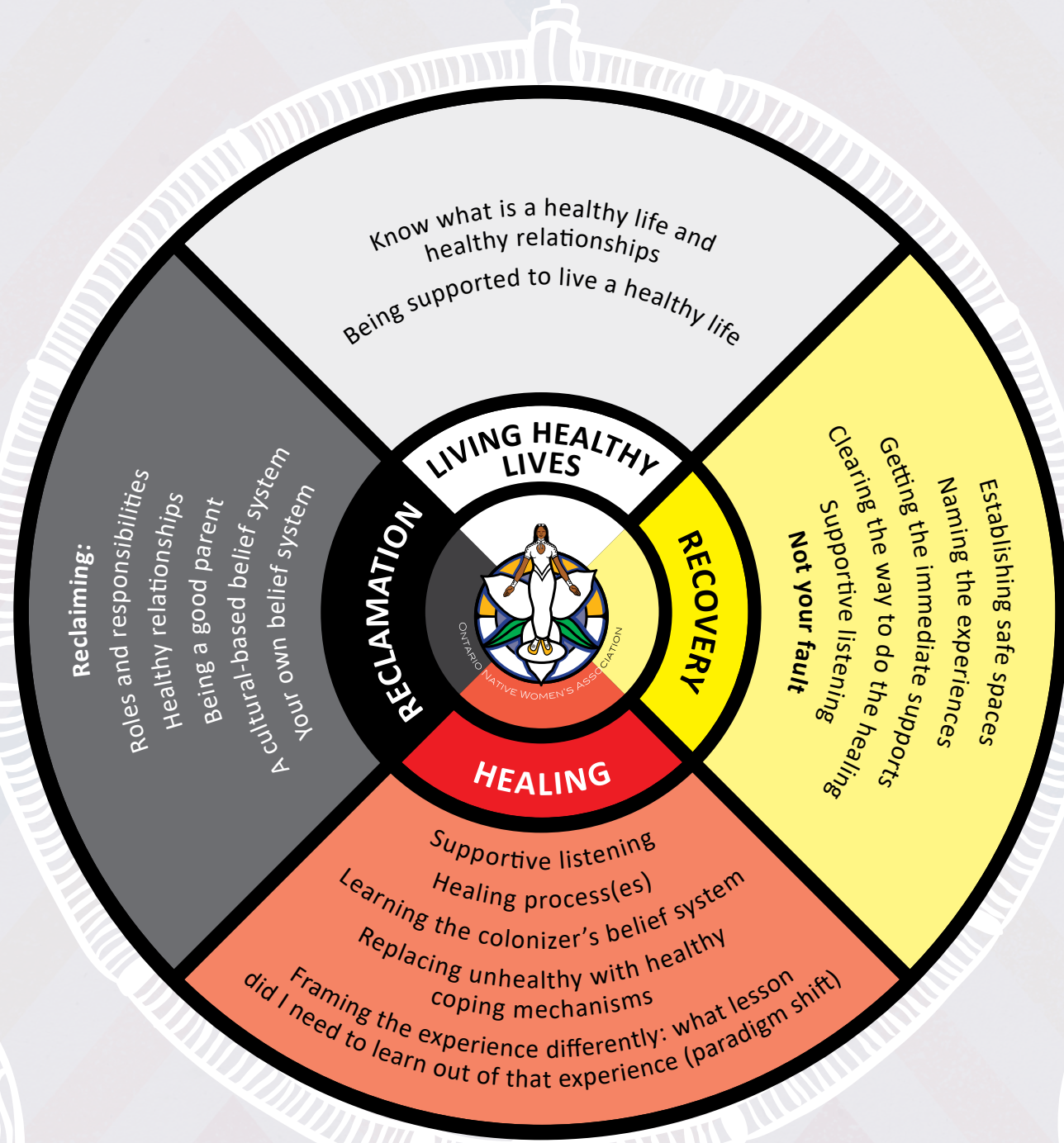
Indigenous women is often with other Indigenous women who offer support with empathy and understanding.

- b) Indigenous women first need to reconcile with ourselves to affect change. When we invest in healing programs for Indigenous women, we ensure that we have a foundation to start affecting change for ourselves and our families.
- c) Indigenous community-based approaches to healing must be acknowledged, funded, and supported. Community-based approaches are healing practices used by established Helpers, Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and Healers. The healing methodologies create an interconnected wholistic continuum of care practice that fosters generational healing and positive long-term therapeutic outcomes. It is critical for healing programs to act as living programs which means the program is adaptable and flexible with respect to design, development, and delivery. Living programs are a wise practice for service delivery organizations as they allow Indigenous women the space to have and use their voices in the program’s design.
- d) Indigenous methodologies must co-exist with Western healing practices. Indigenous healing methods include

**“What’s necessary is
to create stability and
support in the family
with every branch from
the Elders to every next
generation until healing
is no longer necessary.”**

(Community-Based Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls
Submission, 2018)

This graphic is a representation of
ONWA's Indigenous framework for
Healing from Sexual Violence



ceremonies, land-based healing activities, and arts-based healing. The knowledge and worldviews found in the healing practices are foundational for Indigenous women, their families, and communities to re-connect, re-learn, and re-claim their identities.

- e) Indigenous frameworks for healing need to be applied; ONWA has developed a framework around sexual violence (Indigenous framework for Healing from Sexual Violence, page 26). The wheel starts in the East with recovery. Safety and telling the story of the sexual violence experience begins the process. In the South sits healing where people have the opportunity to understand their experiences. In the West, each person reclaims the strengths and roles that move him or her beyond the sexual violence experience. In the North, people live a healthy life.
- f) Community based practices coupled with land-based or arts-based therapy that support the trauma work, wellness strategies, and reconnection to the land are needed to begin individual and community healing. Indigenous healing ceremonies, practices, and interventions allow Indigenous women to build their bundles, their interconnectedness, and balance in the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual realms often referred to in the Medicine Wheel. When one area is off balance, all areas are off balance.
- g) For Indigenous women to heal, we need to know that their children are safe and we are not at risk of losing their children when we go to treatment programs and healing programs. Family treatment programs that provide care to children while women are doing their healing is essential.
- h) Reclaiming of identity is core to healing. Indigenous women have the right to

safety. This requires the ability to self-locate, knowing who you are, where you come from, and where you belong. When reclaiming identity, knowing that hardships and injustices are not your fault is part of healing. Answers to identity questions for Indigenous women are not easy as they navigate child welfare, the Indian Act, the Métis registration process, and being born outside of community unable to answer "Who am I?"

Even when answers are provided, acceptance from family and community does not always happen. We hear from many Indigenous women taken in the 60's Scoop or Millennium Scoop or are descendants through discriminatory legislation that excluded their mother or grandmother, that we are still not welcome in their communities.

Indigenous women are holders of knowledge and wisdom about how to heal our families and communities. Without a substantial investment in Indigenous women, the National Action Plan will not meet any substantial outcomes in the short, medium or long term.

Recommended Action 5.1

Reinstatement of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding and programs to support healing services for Indigenous women, families and communities.

Recommended Action 5.2

Establish addiction programs and services for Indigenous women that support families staying together as part of the healing process.

June, Strawberry Moon

The sixth moon of Creation is the Strawberry Moon. The strawberry's medicine is reconciliation. It was during this moon cycle that communities held their annual feasts welcoming everyone home regardless of their differences over the past year, letting go of judgement and/or self-righteousness.



“To regain their voices back and have more seats at Indigenous traditional and non-traditional tables.”

(Community-Based Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Submission, 2018)



6 Restoration of Indigenous Women's Inherent Rights

Centuries of historical and ongoing colonialism disrupted Indigenous women's inherent rights. While efforts have been made to restore some of these rights—mainly manifested as the restoration of status through several legislative changes spanning decades—the discriminatory effects of Canada's laws continue.

Traditional governance structures included women who held decision-making authority. Women were valued based on the merits of their experiences and for their contributions to society. Indigenous women had the right to self-determination since time immemorial as matriarchs of sovereign nations of Turtle Island (North America). We had jurisdiction to administer and operate our own political, legal, economic, social, and cultural systems including those that affected our bodies, lands, resources, families, memberships, identities, and well-being. (Chiefs of Ontario, n.d.)

The right for Indigenous women to be equal participants in governance structures was

never extinguished by treaty. The right was integral to Indigenous peoples' cultures and societies. Aboriginal rights under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* applies equally to men and women. However, for Indigenous women's rights to be recognized by the courts, the burden is placed on Indigenous women to prove their rights, primarily through the courts. Women have been historically disadvantaged in comparison to their male counterparts. The nature of section 35 asserts Crown sovereignty while diminishing Indigenous sovereignty further marginalizing Indigenous women's issues. (Sayers, Naomi, *Contradictions of Constitution Act, 1867-1982: Section 35[1]*) Canada's colonial systems and laws do not supersede Indigenous women's inherent rights.

The Indian Act disrupted Indigenous women's inherent right to equal participation in governance by the imposition of the chief and council system which made it illegal for women to run for chief or council or vote in their own community until the late 1950s. First Nation women lost their Indian status when they married a non-Indigenous or non-status man.

Patriarchal values and systems became the status quo.

Indigenous women's issues continue to be marginalized and excluded from political discussions even though Indigenous women make up half of the Indigenous population (Arriagada, 2016).

In the last five years, the federal government repeatedly used the nation-to-nation framework that they designed and that discriminates against Indigenous women and girls.

In 2016, the federal government established a nation-to-nation policy. For their nation-building partners, they chose three national Indigenous organizations: the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Métis National Council, and the Inuit Taparit Kanitami.

The government of Canada did not recognize or work in any meaningful way with Indigenous governance structures or systems including clan mothers and hereditary chiefs. The government did not engage in a process that supported Indigenous communities and people to identify who they consider legitimate representatives in nation-to-nation discussions.

The majority of Indigenous people who live off reserve might be represented by an organization that does not necessarily understand or relate to their issues. The Nation to Nation discussions had led to the construction of legislative

frameworks (Bill C-92, an act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth and families), reallocation of responsibilities, and federal government funding for the three aforementioned organizations in areas they do not have expertise in i.e. early childhood development, housing, health or education.

As articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Indigenous women's inherent rights give them autonomy outside of colonized government frameworks like the Indian Act. Yet, the only way First Nation women have a legitimate voice is through the nation-to-nation discussions via the Indian Act and the AFN.

What constitutes the AFN legitimacy to represent First Nation women and girls in the context of nation building and particularly urban Indigenous women who are not connected to their First Nation community? The AFN is a representative body of chiefs established and recognized through the Indian Act which has embedded forms of sex discrimination as demonstrated in multiple court case victories. (Lovelace, Lavell, McIvor, Matson, Desheneaux and Gehl)

The government of Canada instituted a Gender-Based Analysis + throughout government; yet, it is clear that a GBA+



July, Raspberry Moon

The seventh moon of Creation is the Raspberry Moon when great changes begin. By learning gentleness and kindness, we may pass through the thorns of its bush and harvest its fruit, knowledge that help in raising our families.



analysis was not applied to the nation-to-nation policy framework. If the government recognizes that past federal government approaches were based on patriarchal values, then why continue to fund and invest only in those institutions that are based on patriarchal institutions that perpetuate sex discrimination?

The government of Canada has not engaged Indigenous women in any meaningful way in the development and implementation of the nation-to-nation policy framework. The process continues to marginalize and alienate Indigenous women from substantive policy, funding, and governance conversations and decisions.

To address Indigenous women's issues, their issues need to first be represented at all levels of government including in their home communities, municipally, provincially/territorially, and federally. Indigenous women must be equally represented in governance structures that affect them. The National Action Plan to address violence against Indigenous women and girls must support Indigenous women's inherent right to be equal participants in governance structures.

Recommended Action 6.1

The government of Canada meaningfully engages Indigenous women and invests in Indigenous women's organizations to develop federal policy and funding formulas. A nation-to-nation policy framework must ensure that Indigenous women are guaranteed equitable representation at all levels of governance including in their home communities, municipalities, provinces/territories, and federally.

Recommended Action 6.2

The National Action Plan should *not* use a distinction-based approach when moving to implementation so as not to create divisions in urban communities or between urban and other Indigenous communities. The plan should not ignore the needs of Indigenous women who are not connected to national Indigenous organizations. The National Action Plan must include all Indigenous women, regardless of whether we are First Nations, Inuit or Métis and regardless of where they live.

Restoring Balance within Communities

7

For Indigenous women to be safe, their communities have to be safe. At ONWA, we honour and acknowledge all Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We support healing processes for families and community connected to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. To restore balance to Indigenous women, we need to restore balance in communities we live in.

For the National Inquiry work, ONWA developed a three-part action plan to ready communities for the community gathering processes. This required building relationships in communities. We mobilized, recognized, and met community needs and cultural practices ensuring aftercare and safety planning.

Our community engagement process needed to be proactive to mobilize an action plan to bring together our community partners. The strategy began by connecting with Elders and Knowledge Keepers to guide us through traditional healing and ceremonial protocols. We engaged service providers like crisis response, addiction and mental health services, child welfare services,

police, and medical services. The approach enabled accountability, awareness, and transparency to provide services readily available for a seamless service continuum of care practice.

Many Indigenous women describe how they live in two communities: their home community and their current community. While each place is unique, there exists a pattern of discrimination against Indigenous women rooted in patriarchal values imposed on Indigenous peoples.

Legislative policies' historical discrimination against Indigenous women force Indigenous women to fight to reclaim their places in society and in their communities—a long fight that Indigenous women have not always won.

In the Sharon McIvor v Canada decision, two remedies were developed to address sex discrimination. Only one part of this remedy has been partially implemented with a change in the law that entitles women and their descendants to 6(1)(a) status on the same footing as their male counterparts.

Indigenous women are not recognized for their gifts and responsibilities. As such, our communities can never be restored without changing the actual processes and practices we use to make change.

Registration of women to restore their Indian status has been stalled in the federal bureaucracy. Many First Nation communities do not have capacity to welcome Indigenous women and children back home. Communities struggle with so many issues that the idea of community members coming home without additional resources is not realistic.

A second reparation – the addressing of residual discrimination in communities – has not been addressed at all. The decision recognized that Indigenous communities had absorbed patriarchal values. Without changes in the community, those values continue to discriminate against Indigenous women.

To ensure effective nation building, we need healthy communities inclusive of First Nation women. It requires immediate investments to combat residual discrimination in communities that have their governance and other structures structured by the Indian Act. Investment should support autonomous Indigenous women's organizations as recognized in UNDRIP and in the National Inquiry Calls for Justice.

Recommended Action 7.1

Remedy of sex discrimination in the Indian Act be fully implemented including residual discrimination in communities that remain a legacy of the governance structures imbedded in the Indian Act.

Recommendation Action 7.2

The federal government put appropriate investments into S-3 implementation including appropriate staffing for the registration of women and their children under S-3 and that a strength-based educational campaign be developed for First Nations communities and for women who want to apply.

Recommendation Action 7.3

Indigenous communities receive support to establish comprehensive safety plans in their communities in which Indigenous women lead the engagement and design of the plan and communities invest in those plans.



August, Thimbleberry Moon

The eighth moon of Creation is the Thimbleberry Moon. We honour the thimbleberry which produces an abundance of fruit once every three years. The thimbleberry is one of the first plants put on Mother Earth. Its purpose is to protect the sacred circle of life by allowing us to recognize and understand teachings that come from the Spirit World.

Addressing the Many Forms of Violence that Indigenous Women and Girls Face

Ending the violence against Indigenous women that too often culminates in Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls requires looking closely at and addressing the everyday issues Indigenous women face. When ONWA staff deliver programs and services, it is often necessary for staff to find a safe space and sit with a woman who is dealing with past or current violent experiences.

Based on discussions with Indigenous women, ONWA identified eight key issues that impact Indigenous women's safety. The eight key issues are sexual violence, family violence, human trafficking, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, child welfare, health, justice, and housing.

All ONWA programs, services, research, and policy have some focus in these areas and provide support to Indigenous women in these interconnected forms of violence. Violence against Indigenous women manifests in multiple ways but always ends in doing harm.

The National Action Plan needs to have a targeted focus on two areas that receive the least amount of support and investment.

Sexual Violence

In 2011, ONWA and other provincial Indigenous partners convened a small gathering of leaders to discuss how to move forward to combat sexual violence. None of the report recommendations have been acted on.

Sexual violence is a silent issue in Indigenous communities. Embedded in the historical legacy of colonization, sexual violence today continues in many manifestations. The pain of the violence is so entrenched that a conversation about the topic must start with safety and care around the person, the family, and the community. To address sexual violence in Indigenous communities requires a coordinated long-term community healing process. Ending sexual violence is related directly to healing from colonization.

Sexual violence is not addressed in communities for many reasons. Sexual violence is normalized for children and youth. Some communities have hot spots including where organized sports events occur. The person who assaults the woman or girl is known to her and in some cases, are family and friends. She is dependent on the person who violated her. The community is small and women do not want other community members to know. In some communities, negative repercussions occur from naming the assailant. Indigenous women have zero confidence they will be believed by authorities including the police and hospitals. Finally, the service model is so disrespectful, Indigenous women are re-traumatized. We have heard of women—after a sexual assault—being put in the back of a police cruiser and driven for over two hours to receive appropriate medical care including getting a forensic kit.

In 2019, ONWA initiated the *She Is Wise: Addressing Sexual Violence* in our Communities project to apply the recommendations from the 2011 report in a few communities in Ontario. The recommendations include recognizing the need for safety levels, having leadership speak out, applying culture based, gender based, family and community based approaches. The systems in place to respond to sexual violence are not safe places for Indigenous women. New services and programs based on Indigenous ways of healing need investment.

Human Trafficking

The lack of reliable data on the scope and prevalence of Indigenous Human Trafficking in Canada poses challenges when designing policy and programs to prevent and address

human trafficking. Research on human trafficking can be difficult because of the complex nature of the crime. Survivors may fear reporting their experiences to authorities. Reliable disaggregated data is necessary to allow policy makers, law enforcement, and survivor advocacy groups to design and implement effective responses to the issue.

It is important to note the connections drawn between risk factors for human trafficking and child welfare involvement. (Sethi, 2007) Children and youth in care are more vulnerable to human trafficking for various reasons including “their potentially unstable living situations, physical distance from friends and family, traumatic experiences, and emotional vulnerability.” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017) Efforts to reduce Indigenous women and girls’ vulnerability to human trafficking must address the disproportionate involvement of child welfare agencies in the lives of Indigenous mothers and the high apprehension rates of Indigenous children.

Services for human trafficking survivors need to be specific and specialized. Short-term pilot projects are ineffective to meet the long-term needs of survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Services need to be accessible across the country so that survivors can access services that meet basic needs and ensure their safety no matter where we live. Services aimed at women—including women’s shelters focused on domestic violence—often do not meet the needs of women who have been trafficked.

In 2017, ONWA began delivering the Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Liaison (IAHTL) Project, which supports Indigenous communities by providing survivor-focused and localized responses to human trafficking. The IAHTL project engaged more than 3,360 community members including over 250 self-identified Indigenous

Human Trafficking Survivors and developed a comprehensive model to address the needs of Indigenous survivors.

In 2018, ONWA began delivering the Aakode’ewin (Courage for Change) Human Trafficking Crisis Response program. The survivor-lead program uses trauma-informed practices and builds capacity to support service needs based on Indigenous women’s recommendations. The program is unique in Canada as it provides long-term intensive case management with a primary focus on culture and traditional healing. Aakode’ewin is only located in two Ontario communities. It has successfully assisted 47 women exit human trafficking in its first two years of operation.

Recommended Action 8.1

All recommendations from ONWA’s 2019 *Journey to Safe SPACES* report be a program development guide in all areas of work for Human Trafficking. ONWA works as a partner to implement the National Action Plan recommendations. First priorities are:

- Sustainable programs and services that address survivor-specific needs—including wrap-around 24-hour services for Human Trafficking in cities across the country—be implemented. Specialized staff provides trauma-informed care with an understanding of sexual exploitation and the realities of women who are trafficked. Services must be provided in a non-judgmental way. Survivor perspectives and expertise inform the development, implementation, and evaluation of services.
- Collaborative mechanisms be put into place to allow for provincial and national data collection on the human trafficking

of Indigenous peoples that balances the privacy of survivors who access services with data collected by the legal system.

- Specialized trauma-informed victim services for survivors who appear in court be created. When charges are laid against a trafficker, survivors need to be supported by specialized, trauma-informed services. Survivor safety must be prioritized throughout legal processes including protecting survivors from re-victimization in providing witness testimony.

Recommended Action 8.2

The development of a National Strategy on Sexual Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls. The plan must focus on the root causes of sexual violence against Indigenous women and girls through the provision of trauma-informed culturally-grounded supports for women and girls experiencing this form of violence. The plan includes:

- The need for increased and equitable funding for emergency health services, medical services, sexual assault prevention, and response services for Indigenous women and girls to ensure we receive the necessary care and treatment including aftercare supports.
- All First Nation nursing stations be provided the equipment and training resources to safely perform sexual assault evidence kits in a respectful trauma-informed culturally-appropriate manner.



September, Corn Moon

The ninth moon of Creation is the Corn Moon during which time we learn about the cycle of life. Each cob of corn has 13 rows of multicolored seeds which represent all spirits waiting to begin their Earth Walk. These will be the future generations for whom we must prepare.



9 Moving Beyond the Legal System to Justice

Families of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls repeatedly described their negative experience of dealing with the legal system whether it be the police or lawyers. The Canadian legal system needs to be made more responsive to the unique challenges and needs of Indigenous women. Ultimately, the legal system needs to be transformed into a culturally-safe justice system invested in Indigenous women's well-being and free of discrimination and racism. The families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls need to have access to a justice system that is well-coordinated and accountable.

Indigenous Women as Victims in the Legal System

When Indigenous approaches are introduced into the legal system—including sentencing circles, Indigenous courts, and restorative justice approaches—we have the ability to move forward to a just system if Indigenous women, as victims of crimes, are supported

and offered services equivalent to the crime's perpetrator. The system today provides the offender with opportunities to write a Gladue report and to proceed with a restorative justice process including access to healing, addiction, and support programs. The Indigenous woman, as a victim, is offered limited services supporting her through the trial and other legal processes. True restorative justice requires all parties involved are restored. This must include investment for Indigenous women.

Indigenous Women in Corrections Services

Indigenous women continue to be convicted for criminal offences in growing numbers in the provincial and federal systems. Often, their crimes are directly related to poverty, domestic violence, and negotiating for basic needs through sex and other survival approaches. In ONWA's work offering court services and Gladue reports, we have seen the level of complex and interconnected issues that many women deal with including the lack of healing from trauma,

addictions, being trafficked, homelessness, and the loss of Indigenous identity. Incarceration is not the answer to these issues.

Indigenous women who experience incarceration need to have access to culturally-grounded supports that seek to address the contributing factors to a woman's involvement in the criminal justice system. Indigenous women's organizations are perfectly placed to do this work but we must have the support of both federal and provincial governments to continue.

Police

The issue of police accountability is a conversation that needs to be addressed at many levels. Indigenous women deal with all types of police forces in Ontario: the Ontario Provincial Police, local city police, Native police, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Each have unique issues but the RCMP stand out as fundamentally broken in their ability to relate respectfully to Indigenous women.

All police forces have to acknowledge the level of systemic racism embedded in their professional practices. We have to restore a basic humanity in their service. A story that never left us was described by a mother in a sharing circle. Her daughter was walking around naked in a neighbourhood. The police arrived after a neighbour called. A witness heard the woman tell

police that a man "tried to kill her and drown her in the lake." She identified who had attacked her however, the police determined there were no grounds for a criminal charge. They drove away leaving her alone and naked. The mother kept asking, why would they do that to her daughter?

ONWA's head office is in Thunder Bay and there have been a number of reports about the level of systemic racism embedded in the police force. In 2018, the report, Broken Trust: Indigenous People and the Thunder Bay Police Service developed a number of specific recommendations to address systemic racism in the police force. That same year, Senator Murray Sinclair did an investigation of the Thunder Bay Police Services Board Investigation.

There is increasing scrutiny on police forces across Canada to address racism. Indigenous women need to play a role in transforming police culture and practice.

Recommended Action 9.1

Establish a strengths-based Indigenous Women's Victim Services Strategy that focuses on providing culturally-safe and effective victim services. Indigenous women should design and develop the strategy to support culturally-appropriate outcomes



October, Falling Leaves Moon

The 10th moon of Creation is the Falling Leaves Moon, a time when Mother Earth is honoured with the grandest of colours. As all of Creation makes their offerings to her, we become aware of all the miracles of Creation before us and our spiritual energies are once again awakened.

10

rooted in an understanding of the whole health and well-being of Indigenous women and their families.

Recommended Action 9.2

Establish clear policing standards and training related to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls regardless of the police force.

Recommended Action 9.3

Develop national standards for Gladue reports that are culturally-grounded and trauma-informed. The standards must be Indigenous developed and implemented.

Recommended Action 9.4

Establish adequate and permanent funding to Indigenous-led non-profit organizations to provide culturally-grounded trauma-informed Gladue support services and to fulfill the intended remedial purpose of the Gladue principles. Autonomous Indigenous women's organizations should be given priority funding for Gladue report writing and Gladue support services programs for Indigenous women. For individuals who completed a Gladue report and have identified sexual assault or human trafficking and if they want to, an investigation

be automatically initiated, as there is no statute of limitation on these crimes.

Recommended Action 9.5

All police forces across Canada review and implement the recommendations from the 2018 report, Broken Trust: Indigenous People and the Thunder Bay Police Service and/or do their own inquiry into their organization's behaviour around systemic racism; and all police forces develop and maintain procedures and processes for criminal and general investigations:

- Criminal Organization;
- Human Trafficking;
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; and
- Hate Crimes and Violence against Indigenous Peoples.

Policy and Research Capacity – Revealing the Story and Understanding its Meaning

Despite the lack of investment in Indigenous women's organizations including in areas of policy and research, Indigenous women have found ways to insert themselves into policy processes and initiate Indigenous women research projects. We cannot forget the start of the process to get to a national Inquiry was the Sisters in Spirit research initiated by the Native Women's Association in 2005.

For the past five decades, ONWA established itself as an expert in Indigenous women's issues and has been a leader in research, advocacy, policy development, and programs that focus on local, regional, provincial, and national activities. Capacity building must be strengthened to ensure Indigenous women have tools for success and sustainable well-being.

ONWA is highly capable of developing National Action Plan draft outcomes to address violence against Indigenous women and girls that hold the federal government and systems that negatively impacted Indigenous women and their families accountable to the Calls to Action. Indigenous

women laid the foundation and started the groundwork with our blood, sweat and tears. The federal government must act now. How we achieve this must be grounded in accountability measures embodying the true spirit and intention of reconciliation and partnership with Indigenous women's voices at the table.

Indigenous women's organizations operate with less funding than other Indigenous organizations and far less funding than mainstream agencies. This has a direct impact on the policy capacity of Indigenous women's organizations where policy staff often work on multiple, complex files under circumstances precariously funded through small pots of money. In 2018, with cuts to Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women in Ontario (EVAIW), ONWA no longer had funding for policy analysts to focus on EVAIW as a specific issue just as the National Inquiry released its final report and as violence against Indigenous women has never been more prevalent.

Policies that impact Indigenous women cannot be developed without meaningful engagement of Indigenous women. Oftentimes, Indigenous women are consulted as an afterthought when it comes to policy development and implementation. The current trend of tokenistic consultation after drafts have been prepared and with a short time frame must end. Policy development and implementation processes must be led by Indigenous women. An Indigenous gender-based analysis needs to be integrated into any policy development starting with the need to review and analyze current government policies.

Performance Measurement Strategy

For a National Action Plan regarding ending violence against Indigenous women and girls to be a success, it must include a gendered Indigenous-informed performance measurement framework with accountability and outcomes related to the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The performance measurements must go beyond tracking data on death rates or numbers of missing Indigenous women. It must measure levels of increased safety for Indigenous Women and Girls.

Beginning with a premise that Indigenous women have a right to safety, we can structure a performance measurement framework with indicators that inform us how close we are in making the outcome a reality. Collecting data that accurately measures and considers the lived realities of Indigenous women is a way in which we can uphold Indigenous women's right to truth. This helps

Indigenous women to reclaim leadership in their lives.

The next step is the programs and services for and by Indigenous women. It is critical that program development, funding, and reporting structures recognize the need to balance the immediate crisis-related issues and then move to the implementation of prevention strategies.

The data collected must speak to the need for specific programs and their impacts. Data collected from Indigenous women must be gathered in ways that ensure safety and apply Ownership, Control, Access and Possession principles (OCAP) and trauma-informed approaches. The data needs to tell the story of each safety initiative, its measurable intent, the results and analysis of intended and unintended outcomes.

Research

More research is needed to identify and assess solutions on the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Specifically, more research with Indigenous women and girls conducted by Indigenous women's organizations is necessary. Indigenous women's organizations are best equipped to carry out the research. Women understand the need to collect gender-based Indigenous data—quantitatively and qualitatively—and to apply a culturally-based trauma-informed approach. ONWA's Indigenous Research Framework follows our She is Wise Framework and re-centers research around Indigenous women's stories, experiences, and existence while ensuring their right to safety.

We recognize that Indigenous women and girls are the experts in their lives and that we hold the knowledge needed to provide insight and develop solutions. It is time to shift the practice of the over-researching of Indigenous peoples

by non-Indigenous researchers. Data collected must belong to the Indigenous organization or community that collected it. We refer to this as data sovereignty. This is critical to ensure data is not misinterpreted, manipulated, or misused.

The actual number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is unknown. The RCMP recorded a number of 1,181 in their *Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview* (2014). Indigenous advocates suspect the number is much higher. Due to jurisdictional issues, no national database exists on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. That is highly problematic. Without a national database, it is challenging for policy makers and governments to properly address the issue.

Some Indigenous scholars like Annita Lucchesi, PhD student at Lethbridge University, started collecting their own databases out of frustration. Lucchesi's database "contains almost 3,000 entries of MMIWG, including their names, where they lived, if they were a mother, if other women in their family went missing or were murdered, if they experienced domestic violence and any other pertinent details." (University of Lethbridge, n.d.) Lucchesi's database provides perpetrator information such as their relationship to the victim, gender, race, and conviction status. (Fominoff, 2018) It is important to note that Lucchesi's database contains both Canadian and American cases.

A national database of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls must take on a holistic approach as Lucchesi's does by showing information about Indigenous women and girls that includes how they died, who killed them, and who they were when they lived.

Recommended Action 10.1

The federal government makes a significant investment in research with Indigenous women's organizations to facilitate research on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls that is led and owned by Indigenous women's organizations.

Recommended Action 10.2

A national database on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls be established that addresses jurisdictional issues and that captures information beyond what is currently collected.

Recommended Action 10.3

All levels of government ensure Indigenous women's full participation in policy development and decision-making processes that affect them. This includes a significant investment into Indigenous women's policy capacity and the engagement of Indigenous women's leadership, knowledge, and expertise in policy reform related to social programs and service development. This is essential for Indigenous women to reclaim their voices.

Recommended Action 10.4

Indigenous women become the leaders in the development of a comprehensive performance measurement framework for the National Action Plan utilizing an agreed-upon research strategy that encourages collaboration among stakeholders and combines Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge.



November, Freezing Moon

The 11th moon of Creation is the Freezing Moon. At this time, the Star Nation is closest to us. As every creature prepares for the coming fasting grounds, we are reminded to prepare ourselves for our spiritual path by learning the sacred teachings and songs that sustain us.



11

Education – Learn the Truth

Education discussions often turn towards educating non-Indigenous people about Indigenous peoples' experiences with hopes that the knowledge will transform society. Significant investments in public education campaigns and school curriculum changes have occurred. While that work is important, our focus is on educating Indigenous women and girls.

ONWA recognizes the way forward for many Indigenous women is education but education for many is not an option. Barriers to secondary and post-secondary education for Indigenous women vary and can include: accessibility to funding, geographical distance, transportation costs, lack of childcare, lack of culturally-appropriate curriculums, and change to lack of technological supports. But for all Indigenous women, safety as a barrier is universal. Accessing education means the navigation of educational institutional systems with embedded systemic bias against Indigenous people that ignore, deny, and define Indigenous women in ways that do harm.

To make education a viable option for Indigenous women means that education needs to become a safe place. Despite previous work and the education of the Canadian public to humanize Indigenous women, the education system is not a place that ensures Indigenous women and girls' physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual safety.

What is being taught? How is it being taught? It is critical that Indigenous women understand how patriarchal and colonial policies impact their lives. In knowing this, Indigenous women are better able to move from the space of internalizing colonialism as self-blame to becoming an advocate for their own lives. The right education heals Indigenous women.

At ONWA, many Indigenous women have committed to their educational journey and have advised us on lessons learned and how to move forward. We know that an investment in Indigenous women's education leads to better outcomes for all. Education increases choices in an Indigenous woman's life. She is able to have her own income, to leave an abusive situation and secure her own housing, and to learn skills

that allow her to assume her responsibilities in the family and community.

Investing in education for Indigenous women means providing opportunities for mainstream education and Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing to be offered. Investing in Indigenous education means having access to traditional languages, cultures, Indigenous knowledge, land-based knowledge, life-skills training, and accurate honouring portrayals, histories of colonialization, and stories of impact on Indigenous women. Investing in mainstream systems means that the educational system moves away from messages that normalize violence against Indigenous women. (Maracle, 1988)

The importance of restoring Indigenous knowledges, histories, representations, cultures, and languages through education is critical for future generations to gain a better understanding of their identities, roles, and places in society.

Recommended Action 11.1

An educational fund be set up for Indigenous women and girls to pursue education programs without having to rely on getting permission through chief and council structures.

Recommendation Action 11.2

Invest in Indigenous women's organizations to establish safety standards for educational institutions including learning guidelines for curriculums.

December, Little Spirit Moon

The 12th moon of Creation is the Little Spirit Moon which represents a time of healing. By receiving visions of the spirits and good health, we walk the Red Road with purest intentions. We share this positive energy with our families and friends for the good of all.



12

Culturally-Appropriate Services and Systems that Indigenous Women Navigate

Indigenous women have the right to receive service delivery that supports them to live a healthy, fulfilling, resilient life. Creating reconciliation incorporates evidence-based practices with a priority on Indigenous methodology and a Western conceptual practice that compliments and supports the holistic healing of Indigenous women, their families, and community.

There are two ways to approach service delivery to Indigenous women. One way is to transform organizations, built on colonial values, towards culturally-appropriate, trauma informed values by rooting out the systemic racism that shaped their practice and policy; and that harms Indigenous women. A long list of organizations have done harm including a health care system that participates in birth alerts and does not recognize Indigenous midwifery and an education system that doesn't reflect Indigenous women's lives and history. The second approach is to build programs in institutions based on Indigenous

worldviews shaped and informed by Indigenous community members including Indigenous women who access those services.

Social Determinants of Health

Social determinants of health refer to a specific group of social and economic conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.) Indigenous women suffer the highest rates of poverty in Canada, and therefore, experience the greatest limitations when it comes to safe adequate housing, healthy affordable foods, and a stable income in a workplace free from discrimination. We focus on these specific social determinants in the report as they are severe social problems that Indigenous women face with unique hardships. Solutions to these determinants are paramount to Indigenous women's safety, well-being, and health. They are not only the foundational determinants required to survive but to also thrive.

Food Security and Income Security

Indigenous women and their families' basic human right to food require access to healthy, affordable food and the creation of sustainable land-based food sources within and outside their communities. Due to poverty or unavailability, it is impossible to flourish in any socio-economic capacity when the necessities of life are not accessible.

Addressing the social determinant of income security for Indigenous women goes beyond protected employment. ONWA recommends that the government provide funding for employment equity and equal pay as the majority of frontline essential workers in community are Indigenous women. Women's work is often under-paid and undervalued. Government funding for Ending Violence Against Women sectors and programs must include a living wage comparable to non-Indigenous organizations. This ensures that communities do not have to choose between paying an Indigenous woman an equitable salary or providing food to the community. Program funding for these sectors must be set up for success to ensure Indigenous women's success.

Indigenous women need wrap-around services when seeking education, employment, and business development supports. Programs and services in these areas must be made available beyond national Indigenous organizations that do

not represent a large portion of Indigenous community organizations.

Greater measures by the government need to be taken to ensure that high quality childcare is financially and geographically accessible to Indigenous women. Traditional Indigenous childcare that encompasses extended family and is compensated at a rate equitable to childcare facilities ensures that Indigenous women are provided the opportunity to maintain employment.

Housing and Homelessness

Without housing, there is no way to ensure the safety and well-being of Indigenous women across their lifespan. Housing must meet Indigenous women's needs where they are at in their journey regardless of geography or economic capacity. This involves increasing access to emergency housing including scattered site units and supports for Indigenous women who experience violence or human trafficking. ONWA advocated for Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario to receive additional capital to provide essential services to Indigenous women who experience high rates of violence and human trafficking and have need for rapid access to safe housing.

There is a need to increase funding for programs that support Indigenous women

who experience homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. Federal government funding to ONWA for the provincial expansion of the Nihdawin Program (My House a Place Where I Live) assists Indigenous women to secure and maintain housing essential to ensure their safety and well-being and to keep families together.

Funding allocations for housing development and programs need to take into account the specific needs of Indigenous women and their families and ensure the right to housing is designed, developed, and delivered by Indigenous organizations. The federal government must support and dedicate funding to a national Indigenous housing strategy for urban and rural Indigenous peoples that engages the expertise of Indigenous women's organizations in its development and specifically addresses the needs and safety of Indigenous women and their families.

To ensure an effective service delivery system, organizations need to speak to one another regardless of jurisdiction. Jurisdictional issues affect Indigenous women in multiple ways and through multiple systems. ONWA membership raises the issue when they indicate, "We need open services to all women, regardless if they are off or on reserve." (ONWA, Membership Engagement Report, 2019, p. 26)

There are many jurisdictional gaps when it comes to accessing health care and service continuity on or off-reserve. The gaps are further exacerbated through geography. Accessing services often depends on one's proximity to urban centres. Indigenous women are susceptible to the jurisdictional quagmires. The results are Indigenous women "falling through the cracks" and unable to access services when we want them.

Jurisdictional disputes between government bodies often prevent equivalence in care and create social determinants of health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

The result is a detrimental impact on the health, well-being, and safety of Indigenous women. As illustrated in the recommendation above, no national database exists on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls due to ongoing jurisdictional issues around the housing of data and the administration of a national database.

Recommended Action 12.1

The National Action Plan address the need for increased funding, including capacity funding, to Indigenous women's services and organizations (provincial and local Indigenous women's organizations), Indigenous women's shelters, and Indigenous midwifery organizations. The federal government is held accountable for funding types and amounts flowed to the organizations. The funding must be sustainable and the amounts equivalent to both needs and desired programmatic outcomes.

Recommended Action 12.2

Working with Indigenous women, Indigenous communities identify institutional investments in a wide range of accessible culturally-grounded and respectful community supports and services for Indigenous women and girls.

Recommended Action 12.3

The National Action Plan supports and requires increased collaboration between the federal government, provincial governments, and Indigenous women's organizations to better respond to the social determinant needs of Indigenous women and their families. This can take the form of working groups comprised of Indigenous women whose mandate is to review relevant legislation and clarify jurisdictional responsibilities that impact Indigenous women's lives.



Blue Moon, Big Spirit Moon

The 13th moon of Creation is Big Spirit Moon. Its purpose is to purify us and to heal all of Creation, a process which may take a three-month long spiritual journey. During this time, we receive instructions on the healing powers of the universe and transform into our own vision of the truth.

Accountability

Without accountability, the National Action Plan will not succeed. There are four levels of accountability required for the National Action Plan to have legitimacy.

Accountability to the Families

Work done by the Family Information Liaison Units (FILUs) through the MMIWG has taught many lessons including the importance of families being able to get answers to questions about what happened to their loved ones. Indigenous family members met with coroners and police officers who were their last relationships with their loved one as she journeyed to the Spirit World. By family's requests, ONWA was privileged to be with families during ceremonies to acknowledge the profound loss of another Indigenous woman. These practices need to become the norm as they are essential to healing for families.

Accountability to Indigenous Women and their Organizations

This work started with Indigenous women and Indigenous women's organizations naming the problems, advocating for change, and demanding solutions. This is not the time to sideline Indigenous women's organizations. We must become the key organizations that are invested in to make fundamental changes to beliefs, processes, practices, and systems.

Accountability of Canada to their International Commitments

International bodies through the United Nations have been a leverage point to move issues forward in Canada including the establishment of the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the end of sex discrimination in the Indian Act. Historically, Indigenous women

have relied on non-Indigenous organizations to support us while we tell our stories to the world. It is time that we build our capacity to tell our stories at the United Nations. Other international bodies can support us with fundamental changes that need to be made in society to ensure that Indigenous women and girls are safe.

Accountability in the Community

Every Indigenous and non-Indigenous community needs to step into this work and examine how they can increase safety for Indigenous women and girls. Any First Nation, Inuit, Métis community or urban and Indigenous community organization that accepts funding through the National Action Plan needs to be transparent in how that funding is spent, what outcomes it tries to achieve, and what are actual results. The reports need to be public and evidence-based.

Cities and towns need to update their reconciliation plans and community safety plans to reflect priority actions identified by Indigenous women through the National Action Plan.

Recommended Action 13.1

Establish an oversight body to monitor the National Action Plan's progress. Indigenous women need to play a significant role in governance and operations to ensure accountability and to have input on solutions and outcomes that have lasting positive impacts on Indigenous women and their families. In addition to a national oversight body, there should be provincial and community-based oversight bodies.

Recommended Action 13.2

Establish standardized death investigation processes, provincially and nationally, to ensure that Indigenous women and girls that need an autopsy receive one. Establish a standardized systems approach to death investigations that records the deceased's race in all autopsies. Ensure that the process provides family members with as much information as possible about their loved one's death.

Recommended Action 13.3

Provide Indigenous women's organizations with financial support for staff positions to report on the progress of all levels of government to the United Nations bodies on the National Action Plan implementation.



"Indigenous women must not go missing from the National Action Plan."

Cora McGuire-Cyrette,
Executive Director, ONWA

Conclusion

ONWA went out of our way to support the National Inquiry. We did so because we need the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to be addressed. In 2015, ONWA recommended that the National Inquiry include:

- the voices of family and loved ones
- Indigenous leaders' recommendations
- Indigenous organizations voice female leaders' voices
- culturally-safe healing practices and protocols
- trauma-informed approaches
- traditional Healers and Elders
- communication and transparency

ONWA continues to push for these approaches and now pushes for the National Action Plan. In the action plan, we can ensure a commitment to reach out to families to provide culture and ceremony of their choosing for their healing.

We must ensure that the National Action Plan is based on an Indigenous women's pedagogy, that the necessary and immediate resources are provided to support families, and that all processes need to follow a culturally-safe trauma-informed approach. By supporting families of Missing and Murdered Women and Girls, ONWA knows that activities grounded in culture are extremely meaningful.

We must recognize the impact of the trauma of losing their loved one and the effects of dealing with a racist justice system in the aftermath of their loss. This issue is on top of multiple intergenerational traumas that affect Indigenous women and girls. The work needs to happen on a continuum of care model that

provides community capacity building through development and delivery of Indigenous trauma-informed care training to build skills.

Five years to the day that the National Inquiry was announced and throughout the writing of this report, Indigenous women's and girls' lives continue to be at risk. Indigenous women and girls still go missing and we continue to be murdered. Some families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls still have no answers to what happened to their loved ones. Other families have no support to grieve and heal. Sadly, Indigenous women and girls continue to live in fear and most wonder, "If this was me, would anyone look or bother to come find me?" ONWA recognizes that we are never far enough away from the danger of disappearing.

Indigenous women and girls still go missing and murdered even after all the years that Indigenous women fought to bring the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls forward, for the National Inquiry to be approved, to gather information for the final report, and even as we wait for the National Action Plan to address MMIWG. We need to say yes to meaningful, relevant solutions that end violence against Indigenous women and girls and stop them from being missing and murdered.

Appendix A: Recommendations

Action 1.1

The National Action Plan applies an Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis that ensures safety for Indigenous women and girls is at the focus of all investments through the Plan including measuring the current system's safety levels and dismantling barriers or systems that cause harm.

Action 2.1

The federal government ensures full participation of Indigenous women and their organizations in all aspects of the development and implementation of the National Action Plan.

Action 2.2

The federal government invests in a national gathering where provincial, national, and local Indigenous women's organizations come together to provide advice and guidance on how Indigenous women want to see themselves represented and determine ways to support and sustain Indigenous women's voices into national policy and decision-making processes.

Action 3.1

Indigenous women's organizations receive direct and core sustainable funding to continue policy and systemic work to end violence against Indigenous women and to provide safe spaces for women and their families through services and programs.

Action 3.2

An Indigenous Gender-Based Analysis be undertaken on funding provided to Indigenous women's organization as compared to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations.

Action 4.1

Address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the care of child welfare agencies. A complete realignment of the child welfare system that provides Indigenous women and families with consistent early prevention, intervention, and wrap-around supports. Shift from risk and crisis responses to prevention and support services. The work currently done by the child welfare system be done with, or within, the Indigenous community.

Action 4.2

A committed long standing investment in community-based programs through Indigenous women's organizations that supports and nurtures Indigenous women's ability to mother and includes Indigenous parenting programs that span a child's lifecycle, domestic violence programs that offer culturally-appropriate early intervention and prevention including healing programs and appropriate safety planning.

Action 4.3

Legislative changes to replace "duty to report" with a mandated "duty to refer" and an increase in relationships between health care providers and children's aid societies with Indigenous service providers, such as ONWA, so Indigenous families improve outcomes and mitigate risks.

Action 5.1

Reinstatement of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding and programs to support healing services for Indigenous women, families and communities.

Action 5.2

Establish addiction programs and services for Indigenous women that support families staying together as part of the healing process.

Action 6.1

The government of Canada meaningfully engages Indigenous women and invests in Indigenous women's organizations to develop federal policy and funding formulas. A nation-to-nation policy framework must ensure that Indigenous women are guaranteed equitable representation at all levels of governance including in their home communities, municipalities, provinces/territories, and federally.

Action 6.2

The National Action Plan should *not* use a distinction-based approach when moving to implementation so as not to create divisions in urban communities or between urban and other Indigenous communities. The plan should not ignore the needs of Indigenous women who are not connected to national Indigenous organizations. The National Action Plan must include all Indigenous women, regardless of whether we are First Nations, Inuit or Métis and regardless of where they live.

Action 7.1

Remedy of sex discrimination in the Indian Act be fully implemented including residual discrimination in communities that remain a legacy of the governance structures imbedded in the Indian Act.

Action 7.2

The federal government put appropriate investments into S-3 implementation including appropriate staffing for the registration of women and their children under S-3 and that a strength-based educational campaign be developed for First Nations communities and for women who want to apply.

Action 7.3

Indigenous communities receive support to establish comprehensive safety plans in their communities in which Indigenous women lead the engagement and design of the plan and communities invest in those plans.

Action 8.1

All recommendations from ONWA's 2019 *Journey to Safe SPACES* report be a program development guide in all areas of work for Human Trafficking. ONWA works as a partner to implement the National Action Plan recommendations. First priorities are:

- Sustainable programs and services that address survivor-specific needs—including wrap-around 24-hour services for Human Trafficking in cities across the country—be implemented. Specialized staff provides trauma-informed care with an



understanding of sexual exploitation and the realities of women who are trafficked. Services must be provided in a non-judgmental way. Survivor perspectives and expertise inform the development, implementation, and evaluation of services.

- Collaborative mechanisms be put into place to allow for provincial and national data collection on the human trafficking of Indigenous peoples that balances the privacy of survivors who access services with data collected by the legal system.
- Specialized trauma-informed victim services for survivors who appear in court be created. When charges are laid against a trafficker, survivors need to be supported by specialized, trauma-informed services. Survivor safety must be prioritized throughout legal processes including protecting survivors from re-victimization in providing witness testimony.

Action 8.2

The development of a National Strategy on Sexual Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls. The plan must focus on the root causes of sexual violence against Indigenous women and

girls through the provision of trauma-informed culturally-grounded supports for women and girls experiencing this form of violence. The plan includes:

- The need for increased and equitable funding for emergency health services, medical services, sexual assault prevention, and response services for Indigenous women and girls to ensure we receive the necessary care and treatment including aftercare supports.
- All First Nation nursing stations be provided the equipment and training resources to safely perform sexual assault evidence kits in a respectful trauma-informed culturally-appropriate manner.

Action 9.1

Establish a strengths-based Indigenous Women's Victim Services Strategy that focuses on providing culturally-safe and effective victim services. Indigenous women should design and develop the strategy to support culturally-appropriate outcomes rooted in an understanding of the whole health and well-being of Indigenous women and their families.

Action 9.2

Establish clear policing standards and training related to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls regardless of the police force.

Action 9.3

Develop national standards for Gladue reports that are culturally-grounded and trauma-informed. The standards must be Indigenous developed and implemented.

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All police forces across Canada review and implement the recommendations from the 2018 report, Broken Trust: Indigenous People and the Thunder Bay Police Service and/or do their own inquiry into their organization's behaviour around systemic racism; and all police forces develop and maintain procedures and processes for criminal and general investigations:

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Appendix B: Acknowledgments

This report was written by Cora McGuire-Cyrette, Ingrid Green and Joan Riggs. The writing was well supported by ONWA's Policy and Research department. ONWA's Community Development department plays a continuous role in collecting the voices and stories of Indigenous women through multiple community engagements. Finally the ONWA program staff not only deliver programs and services but ensure that what is heard from Indigenous women is actioned. This was a collective effort and reflects the way of work that best reflects and supports Indigenous women.

Grandmother Moon Art: Jordis Duke © Ontario Native Women's Association 2020

Grandmother Moon Teachings: Arlene Barry, "Kinoomaadiewinan Anishinaabe Bimaadinzinwin", Book Two



ONTARIO NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Empowering Indigenous Women Throughout Ontario

A Voice for Indigenous Women's Issues



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