

Government of Saskatchewan Response to the National Inquiry
into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls



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Introduction

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) released its Final Report on June 3, 2019. The Inquiry provided a critical voice to the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and survivors of violence. We have an obligation to past, present and future generations to prevent violence and ensure safer communities.

Understanding that we have a responsibility to address the urgent and tragic issue of MMIWG, Saskatchewan has developed and advanced a number of integral initiatives, policies and programs in partnership with Indigenous peoples. This document provides a high-level overview of the Government of Saskatchewan’s commitment, contributions and efforts to create meaningful and lasting change.

Saskatchewan Engagement with Indigenous Peoples

The Government of Saskatchewan is working to engage with Indigenous peoples and develop respectful partnerships at many levels. Cultural inclusion and diversity are key priorities. Seeking the guidance of Elders, Elder Advisory Committees and Traditional Knowledge Keepers representing First Nations and Métis groups in communities across Saskatchewan helps ministries ensure distinct Indigenous voices, perspectives and ways of knowing are incorporated into government work across sectors.

Saskatchewan recognizes that the inclusion of families and survivors and pursuit of Indigenous-led solutions are crucial to advancing MMIWG initiatives. Collaborative and reciprocal partnerships have been built through committees and working groups that include representatives from Indigenous organizations. These relationships help form and improve program, policy and legislative approaches.

In July 2020, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, Ministry of Government Relations, and Status of Women Office co-hosted an online session with the federal government and Indigenous organizations to discuss the co-development of a National Action Plan responding to the Calls for Justice. The event highlighted Saskatchewan's promising practices, engagement approaches and challenges related to addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA+) peoples. Federal and provincial ministers and the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan attended. There were presentations from the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations Women's Commission, Les Filles de Madeleine Secretariat Inc., Saskatchewan Aboriginal Women's Circle Corporation, Piwapan Women's Centre, and Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan. Approximately 350 people attended the online event.

Ministries meet regularly with Indigenous organizations to host and fund events, conferences, and gatherings to bring communities together to honour the spirits of MMIWG. For example, the Saskatchewan Missing Persons Partnership has representation from the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations Women's Commission and the Saskatchewan Family Information Liaison Unit, along

The Elders Forum engages with the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General and the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety to provide advice about justice-related policies, programs, and operations. The Elders Forum includes male and female Elders representing all of the major cultural and linguistic Indigenous groups in the province. Examples of programs and initiatives that have benefited from the advice and guidance of the Elders include: First Nations and northern policing; the redesign of the Saskatchewan Coroners Service; Provincial Court jury selection; the design of the Regina Provincial Correctional Centre; prosecutions; and victims services.

The Elders have shared their experience and wisdom regarding services and supports for families of MMIWG and survivors of violence; the broad, systemic issues raised in the Calls for Justice; and reconciliation.

In 2019, the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) hosted its inaugural meeting of Knowledge Keepers, Elders and Traditional Healers representing the nine linguistic groups in Saskatchewan. The Traditional Knowledge Keeper Advisory Committee helps guide SHA's Executive Leadership on how to make system changes that will ensure cultural responsiveness and create culturally safe environments that meet the needs of First Nations and Métis populations in Saskatchewan.

with police, other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, and provincial ministries. Additionally, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General supports the annual Northern Justice Symposium, which has become an important forum to gain the insights of Indigenous peoples and northern communities on many of the systemic issues raised by the National Inquiry.

Responses to the Calls for Justice

The Government of Saskatchewan recognizes that violence against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people is a pressing priority that requires immediate and ongoing commitment to implement preventative actions as well as measures to promote safety and justice. The following initiatives are listed under each of the four primary themes of the National Inquiry: Culture, Health and Wellness, Human Security and Justice.

CULTURE

The Government of Saskatchewan recognizes the importance of preserving and restoring Indigenous culture, identity, language and worldviews.

Ministry funding and grants support Indigenous organizations, events and initiatives throughout the province. Ministries work with Elders and Advisors to support Indigenous families and communities in culturally responsive ways that include holistic approaches for spiritual, emotional, mental and physical healing through counselling and ceremony.

Having spaces that are inclusive of Indigenous cultures reflects the diversity of our province. The Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority, for example, have begun preliminary engagement with the Prince Albert Grand Council to redevelop the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital. Plans for the redeveloped hospital include the design of a dedicated Indigenous cultural space. Creating such a space presents an opportunity for innovative, culturally responsive service delivery. This culturally affirming space will be a foundational component of the building that links to other programming in Prince Albert and surrounding communities.

SaskCulture, with funding from the Saskatchewan Lottery Trust Fund, provides the **Aboriginal Arts and Culture Leadership Grant** and the **Métis Cultural Development Fund**. These programs support activities that preserve, strengthen and transmit Indigenous culture, traditions and leadership in Saskatchewan. The Multicultural Initiatives Fund supports projects that advance cross-cultural understanding and reconciliation.

4 Seasons of Reconciliation is a multi-media teaching unit divided into 10 education modules that promotes a renewed relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadians.

Program resources have been produced under the guidance of the First Nations University of Canada's Indigenous Advisory Circle.

Continuing Cultural Awareness Training Across the Public Service

The Government of Saskatchewan understands the importance of ensuring the public service is aware of the unique place Indigenous peoples have in Saskatchewan. Knowing the history and cultures of First Nations and Métis people is crucial to bringing awareness to the challenges Indigenous women and girls face. With this in mind, Saskatchewan's ministries work toward cultural and historic competency for all public servants. Ministries participate in Aboriginal Awareness Training, Culturally

Responsive Training, the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, 4 Seasons of Reconciliation, Canadian Indigenous Culture training, Respect in the Workplace training and other opportunities to ensure the public service is culturally aware.

Several ministries have a dedicated Senior Indigenous Advisor position that works alongside senior leadership to improve responses and make policy adjustments that respond to the needs of Indigenous communities and organizations. Senior Indigenous Advisors work with their colleagues to create a community of practice that respects and reflects Indigenous perspectives.

The Government of Saskatchewan also supports trauma-informed care training to the public service at large and front-line workers in particular, and has encouraged its partner organizations to also engage in this training and practice.

In 2017-18, the Government of Saskatchewan launched an Inclusion Strategy. Some of the activities undertaken as part of this strategy include:

- a more proactive and targeted recruitment approach focusing on inclusion and diversity group members;
- establishing an inclusion committee in each ministry to assist in developing a more inclusive workplace culture in government; and
- an inclusion toolkit developed by the Public Service Commission in 2019, which is aimed at providing managers and employees with the tools and supports they need to succeed in creating an inclusive workplace culture.

Additionally, each ministry has a staff representative who participates on the Inclusion Community of Practice group. Community of Practice groups meet to discuss and share resources, updates, and learning opportunities, and discuss actions to increase inclusive and diverse workplace environments.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The Government of Saskatchewan recognizes that health and wellness are imperative to the overall needs of Indigenous peoples. First Nations, Inuit, Métis and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people's health and wellness can be addressed most effectively through services designed and delivered in culturally affirming ways. This means respecting and incorporating the advice of Knowledge Keepers, Elders and Traditional Healers from Saskatchewan's nine linguistic

First Nations and Métis content, perspectives and ways of knowing are foundational within all Ministry of Education Kindergarten to Grade 12 curricula to ensure students learn about historical and contemporary experiences, racism and relationships involving Métis, First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples of Canada. Provincial languages curricula are available, as well as locally developed Indigenous courses.

Licensed Professional Counselor, Trauma and Wellness Educator, Duane T. Bowers, shared his expertise with Saskatchewan which helped guide the province's response to missing persons and the engagement process with the Sixties Scoop Indigenous Society of Saskatchewan.

The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority work together on the **Mental Health Capacity Building in Schools** initiative in five schools in the province. The Government of Saskatchewan has also committed funding to provide Mental Health First Aid training to at least one staff member in each of Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions.

groups. This approach promotes system-wide cultural responsiveness to the cultural safety of First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan.

Ministries work with local organizations to develop health and wellness training, education and programs to address violence and abuse, and other culturally-safe and trauma-informed practices and services. Healing projects and programs address the whole individual and include healing circles, life skills development, and mental health and addictions support.

The Grey Wolf Lodge was launched in January 2020 to provide traditional healing practices to patients and families who request traditional support as part of their healthcare plan. A traditional medicine team has been established in the Regina area, and the team is working on ways to better support communities provincially. The goal is to enhance this service over time to provide traditional healing as part of a healthcare option to all citizens of Saskatchewan.

Furthermore, in September 2020 the provincial government announced funding through the Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund for Piwapan Women's Centre in La Ronge. This funding will support a collaborative and holistic domestic violence program to engage the community, build accountability for family violence, promote healthy family relationships and reduce interpersonal violence. The project was developed to support the region's community alcohol management plan by a committee that included representation from Public Prosecutions, Legal Aid, Community Corrections, La Ronge Native Women's Council, RCMP, Victim Services, Lac La Ronge Indian Band Health Services and the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Partnerships Contributing to Health and Wellness

In June 2020, on the one-year anniversary of the MMIWG National Inquiry, Saskatchewan announced that for the 2020-21 fiscal year the First Nations and Métis Community Partnership Projects program of the Ministry of Government Relations would focus on locally-developed projects related to issues raised by the National Inquiry. Special consideration was also to be given for initiatives addressing vulnerabilities within society that lead to risks for inter-personal violence. This will help advance MMIWG Calls for Justice that highlight the importance of denouncing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and people of diverse genders and sexual orientations. In late 2020, the Ministry of Government Relations announced additional funding for this program. The following projects promote leadership skills, mental health supports, educational supports, relationship building, and intergenerational violence awareness and prevention.

The Traditional Pathways Program is a unique, culturally responsive program that provides access to traditional medicine supports and services for First Nations and Métis patients.

The Province recognizes that issues around mental health wellness and suicide prevention are important. On September 24, 2020 a Letter of Commitment (LOC) to address First Nations Suicide Prevention was signed by the Ministry of Health (MoH), Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN). A Steering Committee has been formed with participation from MoH, FSIN, Saskatchewan Health Authority and ISC. The purpose of this Steering Committee is to assist in the sharing of information, and consulting on initiatives designed to reduce the numbers of suicides amongst First Nations peoples, both on and off-reserve. The last meeting of this Steering Committee was on April 21, 2021.

First Nations and Métis Community Partnership Projects

Project	Partners	Purpose	Beneficiaries
Engaging Young Leaders of Today	Big Brothers Big Sisters of Yorkton, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, Good Spirit School Division, and the Yorkton Tribal Council.	Leadership skills including social inclusion, mental health and wellness, school achievement, technological skills to assist vulnerable youth in making choices that keep them safe and on a path of growth and development.	Young adults (ages 18 to 21) and youth (14 to 21) in Yorkton and surrounding communities, and Yorkton Tribal Council First Nations
The Treaty Land Sharing Network	Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the Nature Conservancy.	Opportunities for cross-cultural learning and relationship building. Enhance the safety and security of Indigenous women and girls through strengthening connections to culture and identity and by providing opportunity to access traditional medicines, supplies, food sources, and space for ceremony.	Indigenous women and girls, farmers, ranchers, and rural people
Women & Girls Wellness Group	North Sask Victim Services Inc., Kids First North, Armand Bekkattla Treatment Centre, SHA's Suicide Prevention Program, Community Safety Board, Northern Village of La Loche, and the RCMP.	Awareness and teachings regarding MMIWG, such as interpersonal violence, sex trafficking, substance abuse, healthy relationships, and self-care.	La Loche and Clearwater River Dene Nation
Grandmothers' Teachings	Treaty Education Alliance (TEA), Kids Help Phone, local cultural artists	Strengthen intergenerational relationships while addressing stressors that increase the risk for interpersonal violence. Promote healthy relationships and healing through intergenerational learning and empowerment.	Girls aged 12 to 16 in Cote First Nation, Kawacatoose First Nation, Pheasant Rump Nakota Nation, and White Bear First Nations
The Family Wellness and Healing Project	North West Friendship Centre, Saskatchewan RCMP – Crime Prevention/Crime Reduction Unit Meadow Lake	Address gaps in interpersonal violence-related programs offered in northern Saskatchewan.	Offenders who commit interpersonal violence and their families and communities
Church Renovation Safe Space Project	Keeseekoose Full Gospel Church and Indigenous Services Canada (First Nations and Inuit Health Branch) regional and federal offices	To provide a safe space for victims of domestic violence to stay and access healing supports.	Community members struggling with addictions
Witchekean Lake First Nation Safety Response Program	RCMP Victim Services and the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS), Firebird Business Consulting	To develop a Community Safety Response Program Model to address vulnerabilities of Indigenous Women and Children towards inter-personal violence.	Community members and Witchekean Lake School
Men of the North: Pilot Project	Men and boys in northern Saskatchewan	To engage men and boys in healing from past traumas of intergenerational abuse and decrease interpersonal and domestic violence and build safe and healthy communities.	Community members in northern Saskatchewan
Strategy and Action Plan Development for Response to MMIWG2S Calls for Justice	MMIWG2S Advisory Group (Iskwewuk Ewichiwitochik [Women Walking Together], Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan, OUTFSaskatoon, Les Filles de Madelaine, Saskatoon Tribal Council, Saskatoon Fire Department, Saskatoon Public Library, Saskatoon Police Service, RCMP, both school districts, Sixties Scoop Indigenous Society of Saskatchewan Inc.)	To develop a report and recommendations that would feed into a longer-term strategy and action plan on how to improve the quality of life and health and safety for Indigenous women and girls and two spirit people experiencing all forms of violence, trauma and/or exploitation.	Citizens of the City of Saskatoon
Community Enhancement Project	Prince Albert Police and North Central Indigenous Committee	Identify gaps in current services delivered by other service providers; teach self-defense to Indigenous women and girls; deliver healthy relationship/dating and keeping safe educational classes.	Victims of human/sex trafficking and potential victims of human/sex trafficking
Safety Response Program	Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, Lean Man First Nation	The Mosquito First Nation's Economic Development Corp. in partnership with Kanaweyimik Child and Family Services Inc. has engaged the services of Firebird Business Consulting	Indigenous women and girls
Montreal Lake Cree Nation (MLCN) Domestic Violence Crisis and Transition Support Project	MLCN Urban Services Inc. and the YWCA	To support women and their families fleeing domestic violence across MLCN urban centres in two ways – crisis response and support and transitional support.	Families who are most at risk of failing to leave a violent home and/or slipping through the net of service provision
Be Safe: A Communities Guide to Search, Fire and Rescue	Métis Faamii and Duck Lake, Rosthern, Hague Volunteer Fire & Rescue	Online, educational information, best practices and how-to on search, water and fire rescue and create awareness on Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls.	Community members

It is well documented that Indigenous women and girls in northern Saskatchewan face high rates of interpersonal violence and abuse. Northern Saskatchewan has the highest rate of violent crime against young women and girls in the province. As a result, Indigenous and Northern Relations in the Ministry of Government Relations has taken several measures to address these critical issues. For example, staff have dedicated collaborative supports to the Embracing Life Initiative since its inception in 2014. Embracing Life was recently awarded two grants for the Resiliency Builder project and for youth training and development, adult ally training and the creation of a working group to create northern and Indigenous-specific community wellness and suicide prevention resources. This interagency table focuses on community wellness and preventative measures for suicide that are related to the causes of people going missing and becoming victims of violence. Community wellness and suicide prevention initiatives led or supported by Government Relations staff include:

Community Wellness and Suicide Prevention Initiatives	
Initiative	Description
Pillars for Life: The Saskatchewan Suicide Prevention Plan	Created to guide suicide prevention initiative and activities to the cultural and social landscape of Saskatchewan. The plan aligns with Saskatchewan's Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan and is an important step forward in reducing the province's suicide rates in building strength, resilience and hope in Saskatchewan people.
Northern Healthy Community Partnership (NHCP)	Aims to improve health outcomes across Saskatchewan's north. The partnership cultivates connections and provides specialized tools to help our partners reach the people they serve by working together towards a single, shared goal. Partner organizations jointly identify priority areas for action based on everyday challenges that impact the health of northern Saskatchewan residents. NHCP Action Teams choose, plan, implement and evaluate strategies and projects that address the root causes of an identified issue and provide real world solutions. Active Communities and Building Vibrant Youth are two of these action teams. There are also three others: Babies, Books & Bonding, Healthy Eating team, and the Northern Tobacco Strategy.
Building Vibrant Youth	Working to increase adult allies outside family homes to support youth.
Active Communities	Working to keep communities active and positive.
Lac La Ronge Community Alcohol Management Plan	Core Group – Advocates, collects data and identifies ways communities use and misuse alcohol. This is an interagency table made up of community services, provincial government stakeholders, the municipal government, and Lac La Ronge Indian Band.
La Ronge Domestic Violence Committee	Creating holistic approaches to healthy relationship training, counselling, and program support.
Saskatchewan Alliance for Youth & Community Wellbeing	Support the provincial board for Saskatchewan Alliance for Youth & Community Wellbeing.
Roots of Hope – Mental Health Commission – La Ronge branch	A multi-site, community-led project that aims to reduce the impacts of suicide within communities across Canada. The project builds upon community expertise to implement suicide prevention interventions that are tailored to the local context. The primary goal is to develop an evidence base that includes best practices and suicide prevention guidelines.
Indigenous Spirits Board	Supports youth involvement for cultural programming outside of the school to help youth learn about Indigenous culture, music performing, and language.

HUMAN SECURITY

The Government of Saskatchewan recognizes the importance of ensuring and promoting the safety and security of Indigenous peoples. Programs and services that provide safe access to shelter, protection and services for those fleeing interpersonal violence and abuse, as well as educational and training opportunities, are offered and delivered across the province.

Housing And Shelters

The government invests in sustainable housing for individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation (SHC) partners with communities, ministries, and agencies to fill housing gaps. The Province also continues to partner with First Nations and Métis housing providers that deliver housing to Indigenous people in Saskatchewan.

The Social Housing Program provides safe, secure and affordable housing to families and individuals with low incomes. Rent is subsidized based on financial need. The program prioritizes families and individuals who are temporarily homeless, as well as victims of family violence, including those living in emergency shelters.

Through the Shelter Enhancement Program, funding is available to enhance existing shelter facilities for at risk women and victims of family violence by improving security, safety, accessibility, energy efficiency, and comfort.

Additionally, the Rental Development Program provides funding to Indigenous and non-Indigenous community organizations

to respond to local needs by building affordable rental housing projects for vulnerable and low-income people not commonly served by the private housing market. Projects serve individuals with mental health issues and addictions, individuals experiencing homelessness, at-risk youth, families going through reunification, and victims of family violence.

The Province also develops partnerships with community organizations to provide wrap-around supports and services to clients with complex needs. Partners include:

- Yorkton Tribal Council;
- John Howard Society; and
- Saskatoon Tribal Council.

These partnerships provide second-stage housing for domestic violence, family reunification services, daycare services, meal services, tenant service provided on a fee-for-service basis, and witness protection.

Sawéiyhtotán [suh-WEE-uh-TOTE-tan], which means “let us bless each other through our show of respect for each other”, is an interagency response to individuals in downtown Saskatoon who are homeless. Partners include the Saskatoon Tribal Council, the City of Saskatoon Police Service, the Ministry of Social Services, the Saskatoon Housing Authority, and other organizations that are part of the Saskatoon Inter-Agency Response to Safety and Well-Being. Operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sawéiyhtotán team integrated with support services offered out of White Buffalo Youth Lodge to find either short-term or long-term housing for people in need. The project team had interactions with people where they offered daily health check-ins, transportation assistance, meal delivery and help securing housing. The project pilot started in April 2020 and has been extended to March 31, 2022.

Gabriel Housing Corporation/Adult Fetal Alcohol Spectrum (FAS) Adult Mentoring is a four-unit project that houses families with parents who have a cognitive disability such as FAS. Supports from Eagle Heart Family Services help the families remain together and stay housed.

Silver Sage Holdings Ltd. opened five single-family dwellings for households in need of emergency or transitional housing. Silver Sage acquired and renovated the homes, which are located in residential neighbourhoods close to schools, services and amenities. Silver Sage has partnered with Regina Treaty/Status Indian Services to provide support services for these at-risk clients facing housing crisis.

Social Services partnered with the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) and The Lighthouse Supported Living Inc. (The Lighthouse) for the use of 12 housing units in Saskatoon to rent to clients transitioning from acute care to more permanent housing. The program, **Next Steps Housing**, provides support to help clients manage their mental health. The Lighthouse provides support to help clients live independently (e.g. helping clients find a place to rent and learn meal planning).

As of February 1, 2021, Saskatchewan discontinued the practice known as birth or maternity alerts. The ministries of Social Services and Health, along with the Saskatchewan Health Authority and other partners, aim to ensure supports and services are available to expectant mothers.

The decision to discontinue birth alerts aligns with recommendations from the National Inquiry and recognizes concerns raised by various Indigenous partners and community stakeholders across Saskatchewan about this practice.

The government also contracts with First Nations agencies to deliver the **Family Finders Program** across the province. The Family Finders program focuses on identifying and engaging culturally appropriate family first placement resources on a child's home reserve. When placement is not an option, the program seeks out significant cultural connections for First Nations children in care of the government off-reserve. Family Finders are responsible for family searches and assessment of caregivers.

With the proclamation of *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, early identification of Indigenous status has been prioritized. Additional resources have been dedicated to support reconciling children's eligibility for Indigenous status.

Child Protection

The Ministry of Social Services has engaged in enhanced training to ensure thorough, transparent and inclusive assessments of culturally supportive family resources for children in care. This has resulted in revisions to policy and practice. For example, integrated practice and flexible response approaches work together to promote the safety of children through engagement and collaboration with families and the community. The integrated practice model promotes a strengths-based, culturally informed child protection approach that encourages group decision making, family-centred practice, early intervention and supports for families, children, and caregivers through all stages of the child welfare system. The flexible response approach in Saskatchewan is informed by the guiding principles of the Touchstones of Hope Reconciliation Movement.

In efforts to prevent children from entering the child welfare system, a five-year Social Impact Bond was initiated in 2014 to support the Saskatoon Downtown Youth Centre (Egadz) Sweet Dreams program. This was the first social impact bond in Canada and has received the Governor General's Award for Innovation. Social impact bonds are a pay-for-performance contract in which the government commits to pay investors for improved client outcomes. Since it opened, the program has served 36 women and their children. As of August 2019, 54 of the 55 children involved in Sweet Dreams remained out of the child welfare system and were safely with their families—more than twice the program's initial target.

In 2019, the Government of Canada proclaimed *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. This new legislation aims to reduce the number of Indigenous children and youth in care and improve child and family services. Three Indigenous Governing Bodies in Saskatchewan have provided notice of intent to exercise jurisdiction over child welfare to the federal government: Cowessess First Nation, Pasqua First Nation and Muskeg Lake Cree Nation.

Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Supports

Incidents of interpersonal violence and abuse cannot be treated in isolation of the root causes. The root causes of violence are vast and complex and can include: community attitudes and beliefs, early and repeated exposure to violence, gender inequality, intergenerational trauma, poverty, financial stress, social exclusion, and substance abuse.

And while services may be available in a given community, for confidentiality reasons many victims are inclined to seek services outside their community.

In understanding these complexities, and through the work led by the Interministerial Committee on Interpersonal Violence and Abuse, the Government of Saskatchewan has launched a multi-year Public Awareness Campaign: Face the Issue. The initial phase of the media campaign focuses on women and is designed to spark conversations and engage the community in preventing interpersonal violence and abuse, as well as increasing awareness of services available for victims. The overall purpose of starting these conversations is to change deep seated attitudes and beliefs that contribute to the normalization of violence within Saskatchewan communities. The government has worked with cultural advisors and translators to translate these ads into Cree and Dene.

Additionally, the government has partnered with 211 Saskatchewan to enhance its 24/7 call, text, chat, and web access to information and resources related to interpersonal violence and abuse. Through 211, citizens are able to reach out and get connected with a variety of resources and supports. 211 Saskatchewan services are available in a number of Indigenous languages including Cree and Dene (www.facetheissue.ca).

The Government of Saskatchewan also invests significant resources to reduce and prevent interpersonal violence and abuse through legislation, protocols, policies, programs and services.

All agencies funded by the government to deliver interpersonal violence and abuse services have access to Indigenous language services through Cantalk including the Plains Cree, Swampy Cree, Woodland Cree, Dakota, Dené, Michif, and Sauteaux languages.

The Kids Help Phone (KHP) is provided by the Ministry of Education to help students who may be experiencing mental health challenges, including those that are a result of interpersonal violence and abuse. KHP's professional counselling services are available 365 days a year, 24 hours a day via phone, chat and text. Their Resources Around Me database provides children and youth with the opportunity to search for resources in the local community, including counsellor and mental health supports.

Indigenous Resource Officers (IRO) in crisis response victim services agencies assist Indigenous victims of crime and their families. IROs also assist police agencies with the development and operation of crime prevention initiatives for Indigenous youth, and with liaising with Indigenous communities and organizations.

This includes Indigenous Family Violence Programs (IVF) funded by the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. IVF programs provide comprehensive and holistic support and education to urban Indigenous families dealing with, or at risk for, interpersonal violence and abuse.

Additionally, Missing Persons Liaison positions within crisis response victim services agencies exist to provide specialized victim services that respond to the unique needs of families of missing persons. They also provide training, case consultations, workshops and training materials to other professionals who

work with families of missing persons, including all Police-based Victim Services Programs in Saskatchewan. Their role as liaisons can also facilitate more trusting relationships between police, victims, and the community. The ministry has requested a five-year continuation of federal funding for this initiative.

In 2020 the Government of Saskatchewan introduced **The Protection from Human Trafficking Act** which will enable victims to obtain expedited protection orders, allow for the enforcement of those orders, and provide civil remedies including the seizure of property, bank accounts and the suspension of driver's licenses.

The Government of Saskatchewan also supports a provincial agency to provide specialized missing persons supports such as information and education sessions, training materials, workshops, and consultations to counselors and human services organizations to develop their capacity to work with those

impacted by trauma and loss of a loved one. The agency provides this training to First Nations upon request and involves Elders in these training sessions. The agency also offers specialized counselling, support groups and other services to families of missing Indigenous women and girls and other missing persons.

Saskatchewan's Action Plan to Address Bullying and Cyberbullying has been Saskatchewan's road map in bullying prevention. More than 1,000 students, teachers, parents, guardians and community members throughout Saskatchewan contributed to the plan by sharing their thoughts about the effects of bullying. As implementation of the plan continues, supports for mental health and student/school safety have emerged as additional priorities.

In 2019 the Government of Saskatchewan and partner organizations released an update to a co-developed

Child Abuse Protocol (CAP). The Ministry of Education has also collaborated with education sector stakeholders and developed a Child Abuse Prevention, Education and Response policy statement, administrative procedures for school divisions and in 2020, an online information portal in both official languages. Together these supplementary resources to the CAP address:

- reporting child abuse;
- child abuse prevention education; and,
- responding to child abuse and neglect.

In efforts to reform laws around sexualized violence and intimate partner violence, the Government of Saskatchewan enacted the Interpersonal Violence Disclosure Protocol (Clare's Law) in 2018. This legislation allows the police service to disclose information about an individual's violent or abusive past to intimate partners who may be at risk. Additionally, amendments to *The Residential Tenancies Act* allow for a victim of interpersonal violence to terminate a fixed term tenancy rental agreement without financial burden.

In 2019, Saskatchewan became the first province to use a government-funded approach to pilot the Victim Advocate Case Review. This is an oversight model through which advocates for survivors of sexual violence from provincial and local organizations are given full access to police sexual assault files to look for signs of bias and opportunities for investigative improvements. This project helps improve police responses to sexual violence. In 2021, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General committed to the expansion of Victim Advocate Case Reviews.

Education and Training Supports

Inspiring Success: The First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework is the overarching policy that guides all Ministry of Education actions related to First Nations and Métis education. Saskatchewan's vision is to have a provincial Pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 (PreK-12) education system that places Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures and languages within the structures, policies and curricula to ensure an equitable and inclusive system that benefits all learners. A website also provides supports to education systems as they plan and implement actions under the umbrella of Inspiring Success.

As part of the Saskatchewan's Action Plan to Address Bullying and Cyber Bullying, the Ministry of Education and SaskTel (Crown Corporation of Communications Technology) partner on the Be Kind Online initiative to prevent bullying and cyberbullying by providing access to grants and reliable resources, and promoting digital citizenship. This includes resources to support gender and sexual diversity. Respect in School online training is available for staff and volunteers in school divisions, First Nations schools and independent schools in Saskatchewan. This is in addition to offering funding to all school divisions for more focused training for their staff related to school safety, mental health or suicide prevention.

The Government of Saskatchewan provides resources for educational training and employment opportunities and is investing in Indigenous post-secondary institutions and programs throughout the province. Saskatchewan's public post-secondary sector supports Indigenous students, including women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Targeted funding for Indigenous student success initiatives and Indigenous teacher education programs are made available to specific institutions throughout the province. This funding also supports programs to assist students who face barriers to school completion and promote Indigenous teacher representation in schools across Saskatchewan. Additionally, programs for education and training are provided to enhance opportunities for continued growth and Indigenous participation in the economy. The Government of Saskatchewan strives to build economic reconciliation and works in partnership with Indigenous people and communities to increase economic stability and security of women and families which contributes to greater security.

Currently, **The Saskatchewan Employment Act** provides five employer paid days leave and five unpaid days for employees who are, or whose family member is, the victim of interpersonal and sexual violence. This is the first paid leave in the Act. Additionally, workers' compensation coverage is available for those employees where the crime or injury is work-related."

The Status of Women Office has invested in Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan's **Honouring Her Spark project**, a three-year community-led initiative where Indigenous women work with business, industry, educators and community organizations to improve the economic landscape and increase economic opportunities for Indigenous women in Saskatchewan. This project provides access to cultural and traditional knowledge, healing and learning.

Programs related to Education and Training

Program	Description
Aboriginal Apprenticeship Initiative	Through the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, this initiative aims to increase awareness of apprenticeship training and understanding of the trades as a career option. The initiative supports Indigenous peoples who explore careers in the skilled trades through projects such as apprenticeship courses on or near First Nations communities, mentoring and other career exploration activities.
Essential Skills Program	The Ministry of Immigration and Career Training funds the delivery of essential skills programs through the provincial post-secondary system to help prepare Indigenous workers for a range of occupations. The knowledge and skills gained in the program are important for those who wish to join the labour force, require further training or desire to advance in a chosen career.
Supporting Reconciliation in Schools	The Ministry of Education has developed a website to support school staff to expand understanding of reconciliation, and the history and legacy of residential schools. It contains tools and resources to support student learning and teacher professional development. In 2020, a new module was developed about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
Deepening The Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity Toolkit	The Ministry of Education has also expanded its information portal, Deepening The Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity Toolkit to include a new module developed with Two-Spirit individuals. These online professional development module series support staff, students and families who are gender and/or sexually diverse. A module specific to Two Spirit individuals is included in this resource.
Supporting All Learners Portal	In alignment with a needs-based approach to supporting learning, the Supporting All Learners portal provides resources to assist all students in reaching their academic and personal potential.

The Ministry of Education collaborates with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation to identify a wide range of resources (e.g., print, online, video) to support teachers and students in understanding issues related to MMIWG. Resources include:

- an online catalogue at the Emma Stewart Resource Centre (e.g., a graphic novel titled "If I Go Missing");
- Invisible Victims: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women;
- Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters;
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples in 'Canada': An Inclusionary Approach to Understanding Violence Against the Original People of Turtle Island;

In 2018, amendments to *The Missing Persons and Presumption of Death Act* provided more comprehensive search powers for law enforcement officers investigating missing persons cases. To read the Act or a summary, please see <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/28874>.

- Highway of Tears: A True Story of Racism, Indifference and the Pursuit of Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; and
- Missing Nimama.

JUSTICE

Government is committed to taking a holistic approach to support Indigenous victims and families and friends of missing and murdered Indigenous peoples. To this end, Saskatchewan supports the Saskatchewan Missing Persons Partnership. The Partnership works to prevent people from going missing; coordinates policies to enhance the response when people do go missing; advises on legislation; and collaborates with agencies that provide services for families of missing Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons. The Saskatchewan Missing Persons Partnership has met with families of missing persons on various occasions and has organized Missing Persons Week annually since 2013. In 2020, the partnership launched a set of social media channels.

Justice Canada provides funding for Family Information Liaison Units (FILU) across provinces and territories. The FILUs provide trauma-informed, culturally appropriate services and supports for families. The Saskatchewan FILU, which began operating in September 2017, helps families access information about their missing or murdered family member from agencies such as social services, coroners, prosecutions, and police. In January 2018, the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations was contracted to provide two Indigenous family liaison outreach workers who directly engage families in their communities in collaboration with the FILU. In March of 2021, Métis Nation-Saskatchewan was contracted to provide one additional Métis family liaison outreach worker. In fall 2019, Justice Canada announced an additional three years of funding for the Saskatchewan FILU.

The Saskatchewan FILU has assisted in organizing several cultural-based events for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls:

- a moccasin-making project with Kawacatoose First Nation;
- a music-as-therapy event with Prince Albert Grand Council's Women's Commission;
- an art therapy project with Regina Treaty/Status Indian Services; and
- land-based teachings and gatherings in Lloydminster/Onion Lake, Ochapowace, Buffalo Narrows and Yorkton.

Restorative Justice

Saskatchewan supports culturally appropriate justice programs delivered by or in partnership with communities. This includes a province-wide restorative justice initiative with 20 community-based agencies and four school-based programs, most of which are offered by Indigenous organizations. Community justice and restorative justice programs support reconciliation by playing a key role in reducing the over-representation of marginalized, vulnerable people in the criminal justice system.

In February 2013, the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police (SACP) and the Saskatchewan Police Commission updated and implemented a comprehensive policy for municipal and First Nations police services regarding the conduct of missing persons investigations. The policy addresses concerns the Saskatchewan Missing Persons Partnership heard from families of missing persons, community groups, police, other organizations and individuals. The RCMP "E" Division has substantially adopted the Commission's policy, which results in a more consistent approach to missing persons files across the province.

SACP's website contains a unique database of long-term missing persons with statistics from 1935 – 2019.

Many community justice programs, which are cost-shared with the federal government, involve Elders and community members in activities such as helping victims and offenders, preventing and reducing crime, resolving crime and conflict, and working with at-risk youth. A number of steps are being taken to increase the use of restorative justice practices in Saskatchewan. For example, in 2018-19, training about how to engage victims and meet their needs was offered to all mediators, caseworkers, and community justice workers in programs funded by the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. The Victim Engagement Training Initiative was funded primarily by Justice Canada. The principles of this training have been incorporated into the province's ongoing Victim Offender Mediation training.

Corrections, Policing and Public Safety

The Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety employs a Director of First Nations and Métis Services who is responsible for a number of relevant activities such as overseeing a Cultural Coordinator in each adult and youth correctional facility to ensure that clients have access to Indigenous programming. Cultural programs made available to clients include, but are not limited to: sweat lodge ceremonies, pipe ceremonies, one-on-one Elder counselling, smudging, traditional feasts, tipi teachings, medicine wheel teachings, traditional parenting, sharing circles, drumming, singing, drum making and when possible, gathering traditional medicines.

Within Saskatchewan correctional facilities, Elders/Advisors and Chaplains are contracted by Corrections, Policing and Public Safety to work with Indigenous clients to address issues of grief and loss, loss of identity, self-care, parenting, healing and goal setting. Clients' spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health are addressed holistically.

In 2020, a new initiative began, bringing members of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, Elders Forum and the Indigenous Resource Officers together to develop resources and training components to help police-based victims' services programs support victims of crime more effectively and to build better working relationships with Indigenous communities.

The Government of Saskatchewan recognizes that there are concerns regarding the level of policing on First Nations and in northern Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is working toward effective ways to address these concerns. This includes the involvement of local community consultative groups, supporting Community Safety Officers and Indigenous Resource Officers, supporting the File Hills First Nations Police Service, considering other potential self-administered police services, and more strategic deployment of current RCMP resources. The Province is actively engaging with our federal partners to secure the best policing model possible under the current framework for the First Nations Policing Program.

Annual funding is provided for community consultative groups and community police boards to create crime prevention and reduction strategies in First Nations, Métis and non-status Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan. Community Safety Officers or Peacekeepers are an alternative policing model to deliver community safety services to First Nations communities across Saskatchewan. To date, over 40

Community Safety Officers have been trained in this model.

To enhance civilian oversight of policing in the province, the Government of Saskatchewan introduced *The Police (Serious Incident Response Team) Amendment Act, 2021*. This change implements a civilian-led independent Serious Incident Response Team (SIRT) to investigate all matters where a person has suffered a sexual assault, domestic assault, serious injury, or death while in the custody of the police or as a result of the actions of on- or off-duty police officers. The proposed amendments ensure the SIRT includes Indigenous observation and oversight by requiring the appointment of a First Nations or Métis community liaison if the victim is of First Nations or Métis ancestry. Appointed liaisons will perform functions such as coordinating with the victim and/or their family, and advising investigators on community interactions. In addition, SIRT is required to publicly report a summary of its investigations.

Some additional justice responses to the National Inquiry are highlighted in the chart below.

Other Justice Responses to the National Inquiry into MMIWG	
Purpose	Action
Increase Indigenous representation in all Canadian courts and improve access to meaningful and culturally appropriate justice practices	<p>Since January 2018, the Province has appointed five judges who have self-declared as Indigenous to the Provincial Court of Saskatchewan, three of whom are women.</p> <p>The Province supported the development of three domestic violence courts that provide early intervention for offenders and support to victims.</p>
All governments to thoroughly evaluate the impacts of Gladue principles and consider Gladue reports as a right and to resource them appropriately	<p>Community Corrections has undertaken a review of youth and adult pre-sentence report (PSR) policies to ensure Gladue factors are addressed consistently and thoroughly. These new PSR policies were implemented in January 2021.</p> <p>Public Prosecutions is committed to continually improving prosecutors' understanding of Indigenous circumstances and how those circumstances should be factored into decisions mandated by the <i>Criminal Code</i>; ensuring prosecutions are conducted in a trauma-informed way; and effectively addressing sexual assault myths that threaten to undermine victims' experiences. Ongoing efforts include the creation and revision of Public Prosecutions' Gladue policy and ongoing improvements to prosecutor training.</p> <p>Legal Aid partnered with the University of Saskatchewan's History Department, with partial funding from the Saskatchewan Law Foundation, to develop a Gladue Rights Research Database. This is the first open database of its kind in Canada. The database includes academically peer-reviewed information to assist Gladue writers, Legal Aid, defence counsel, and prosecutors with providing Gladue-related information to the courts. Legal Aid, the Law Society of Saskatchewan, and the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety continue to support the database.</p>

Commemoration Initiatives

Through the Ministry of Government Relations, the Government of Saskatchewan has funded a number of commemorative initiatives. In 2017, Government Relations funded a collaboration between the Saskatoon Tribal Council and the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS) that saw the creation of a statue honouring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which sits in front of the SPS building. Government Relations also sponsored a partnership between the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Women's Circle Corporation and the "F" Division of the RCMP for the creation of the Place of Reflection. The Place of Reflection is a stone medicine wheel located at the RCMP grounds, adjacent to the RCMP Heritage Center, that can be visited by anyone who has felt the impact of the issue of MMIWG or loss through violence.

The Saskatchewan Missing Persons Partnership has also created a number of commemorations dedicated to missing persons in Saskatchewan. For example, in 2014 the Saskatchewan Missing Persons Partnership dedicated an oak tree in Wascana Park, Regina to all missing persons. As the chair of the partnership, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General is providing a grant to the Provincial Capital Commission to arrange for a bench to honor missing persons. When installed, the bench will be located near the missing persons oak tree. The anticipated installation date is fall 2021.

Concluding Remarks

The root causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls are deep, complex and difficult. Colonization, residential schools and other systems of oppression have had deeply damaging impacts on Indigenous peoples and Indigenous women and girls in particular. At the same time, we must also acknowledge the resilience of Indigenous peoples and respect their leadership in reconciliation.

While the Government of Saskatchewan's efforts to address issues raised by the National Inquiry have had many positive impacts, we know there is still much to be done. These first efforts have created a strong foundation on which we can continue our work and close these gaps.

The Government of Saskatchewan remains committed to working with Indigenous peoples and organizations across the province to continuously improve our responses to these challenging issues. The government will also work in concert with Indigenous, municipal, provincial, territorial and federal partners to keep the momentum going even during the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure Indigenous peoples are safe and secure no matter where they live.

