



Connecting hearts and making change

Building on *Breathing Life into the
Calls for Justice: an Action Plan to end
Violence against First Nations Women,
Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People*



AFN Women's Council Statement

This year marks 4 years since the release of *Reclaiming Power and Place: The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Final Report*, which contains 231 Calls for Justice to end the national tragedy of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ (2-Spirit [Two-Spirit], lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and '+' indicating a diversity of remaining identities not listed) Peoples.

Call for Justice 1.1 is the creation of a National Action Plan to End Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Peoples (National Action Plan). In 2021, the National Action Plan was released and included a First Nations-led chapter contributed by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) called *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice: An Action Plan to End Violence Against First Nations Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People*. *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* was written with direct input from First Nations survivors of gender-based violence and family members of missing or murdered loved ones. We recognize that survivors and families have tirelessly advocated for action to be taken to address Missing and Murdered First Nations Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Peoples (MMIWG2S+).

While carrying out engagement to develop *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice*, the AFN made a commitment to MMIWG2S+ survivors and families that the AFN would host a national gathering to discuss implementation of the National Action Plan, the 231 Calls for Justice, and the action and accountability needed for meaningful change.

We are grateful to, and lift up all of the survivors, families, and grassroots advocates who attended the AFN's National MMIWG2S+ Gathering in Vancouver, B.C. We listened to your stories and perspectives during the Gathering and have reflected on them in this report, *Connecting Hearts and Making Change: Building on Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice*.

Connecting Hearts and Making Change keeps survivors and families at the heart of our advocacy work on MMIWG2S+ and reflects the diversity and unique geographic challenges faced by First Nations. Understanding the jurisdictional challenges faced by survivors and families is key to finding solutions to ensure access to supports, resources, and justice.

Supports and resources for community-based prevention services focused on at-risk populations remains a priority. Greater access to culturally based programming is needed to heal from colonial impacts from past government policies. We need a whole of government approach to fund a national strategy on prevention services and grassroots initiatives.

We will continue to push for government action and accountability on implementation of the National Action Plan and the 231 Calls for Justice. First Nations survivors and families have waited too long for justice and stronger commitment is needed to feel meaningful change on the ground. We have heard your call for immediate action to end violence against First Nations women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Peoples and will continue to carry out this work, while keeping survivors and families at the center.



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BACKGROUND

In 2021, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Women's Council carried out regional consultation sessions across Canada to connect with MMIWG2S+ First Nations survivors and families. These sessions culminated in regional reports and a national report *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice: An Action Plan to End violence Against First Nations Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People*.

During regional consultation sessions, families and survivors raised concerns that they did not feel informed of progress and initiatives regarding MMIWG2S+ advocacy and resourcing. A lack of communication exists regarding the MMIWG2S+ Inquiry, advocacy, and action on behalf of government entities. In response to this persistent theme, the AFN committed to hosting a Family Gathering with the intention of being both informative and providing an opportunity for survivors and families to contribute to strategies for ending violence against First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ Peoples.

The AFN coordinated and hosted the first National MMIWG2S Gathering in Vancouver, British Columbia from February 14 to 16, 2023. The gathering was in-person, with the option to participate virtually. Gathering proceedings were recorded to create this report, which includes the voices of those who spoke to influence change for survivors and families. What follows is a document that is a cousin to *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* and a continuation of the AFN's effort to end violence against First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People.

PROCESS

FAMILIES FIRST

In alignment with initial regional consultation sessions, the National Gathering used a 'families first' approach that is inclusive and supportive of survivors and family members.¹ The 'families first' approach places survivors and families at the centre of conversations and decisions. The AFN understands the realities of MMIWG2S+ and advances this work with kindness and compassion, knowing the impact MMIWG2S+ has on First Nations communities.

TRAUMA-INFORMED

As a part of the families first approach, a team of trauma-informed mental health counsellors were present throughout the Gathering. In addition to being available during all daytime proceedings, sharing circles were hosted by the team each evening. Traditional openings and closings, prayer, medicines, and ceremony were incorporated into the Gathering.

¹ Resolution 08/2021, *Implementation of the National Action Plan to End Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA People*.



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ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS

The AFN sponsored First Nations survivors and families to attend the Gathering to ensure many diverse voices were included. The time and location of the Gathering aligned with Vancouver's 32nd Annual Women's Memorial March, which led to many onsite registrations as news of the Gathering spread by word-of-mouth at the separate event. The representation for the regions was as follows:

REGION	IN-PERSON	VIRTUAL	TOTAL
Alberta	38	16	54
British Columbia	115	38	153
Labrador	0	1	1
Manitoba	60	15	75
New Brunswick	20	11	31
Newfoundland	3	4	7
Northwest Territories	14	0	14
Nova Scotia	17	8	25
Ontario	48	29	77
Prince Edward Island	2	0	2
Quebec	17	9	26
Saskatchewan	31	9	40
Yukon Territory	19	2	21
N/A	31	12	43
Total	415	154	569

FACILITATION

The Gathering was held at the Westin Bayshore Vancouver. Participants took part by listening to presentations and contributing to discussions in plenary sessions and partaking in smaller regional breakout sessions. Facilitators, Michelle Sault and Wina Sioui, supported the Gathering. The approach created space for information to be presented, Q&A sessions, and opportunities to feed into strategy. The intention was to bring survivors and families together to work towards solutions that the AFN can advocate for and implement.

SETTING

The Gathering was very emotional, with many participants feeling frustration, sadness, and grief. In a statement that summarized the Gathering, one participant expressed that "Indigenous women experience the highest rate of



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everything horrible in this country.” Despite the heavy sadness, there was also celebratory energy as survivors and families came together to share, support one another, and work towards change. The agenda was adjusted to give survivors and families more opportunities to share their stories and challenges in a plenary setting, rather than breaking off into regional sessions.

The regional sessions were provided as optional opportunities to find out what is taking place regionally and contribute to regional-specific solutions, while an unplanned plenary discussion continued. The intention of the regional sessions was to have short presentations followed by solution-oriented group discussions, however, much of the time was spent discussing what regional organizations are already doing. This initial Gathering was successful in providing information and a forum for survivors and families to voice their challenges, needs, and solutions.

THE COLLECTIVE VOICE

PERSPECTIVE

This report is an expression of the collective voice of survivors and families represented at the Gathering. Some participants carry raw grief, others frustration, and all a desire for change. Many participants shared memories of their loved ones and details of their distressing experiences. Some survivors and families indicated that every time they advocate for themselves or their loved ones, they are revisiting their trauma. Supportive space was held for the expression of all emotions and calls for change. Survivors and families are concerned that too much money is being made from MMIWG2S+ and indicated that memorializing losses needs to come to an end, with an emphasis instead placed on MMIWG2S+ prevention.

As a collective, survivor and family voices are powerful and unified in the desire to end violence against First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQA+ People.

BREATHING LIFE

Frameworks coming out of AFN's *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* include:

- Supporting survivors and families:
- “Wrap-around” services for survivors and families.
- National investigative taskforce.
- National Indigenous Human Rights Tribunal and Ombudsperson.
- Prevention Services:
- First Nations MMIWG2S+ Prevention Strategy.



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- Healing ourselves and our First Nations:
- Funding for First Nations healing centres, shelters, and safe spaces.
- Resources for cultural practices and land-based activities.
- Mental and emotional health supports for First Nations men and boys.
- Self-determination and revitalizing First Nations laws.

Experiences shared at the Gathering reinforce these frameworks as necessary steps for supporting survivors and families. Additionally, the four pillars of *Reclaiming Power and Place: The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, also taken up in *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice*, were upheld at the Gathering (Justice, Human Security, Health and Wellness, and Culture).

Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice was developed to be an “evergreen” action plan that will continue to evolve. Some survivors and families felt that “evergreen” MMIWG2S+ documents (both from the AFN and the federal government) are not concrete or actionable enough, however, it was noted that this approach respects the need for changes or additions. The evolving nature of these reports is especially important for ensuring inclusion as new and additional survivor and family voices come forward.

This Report presents a summary of sections of AFN’s *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* followed by reinforcing points and unique additions to each Calls for Justice pillar as heard at the Gathering.

JUSTICE

What follows are the Justice (and Policing) National Priority Action Items from AFN’s *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* Action Plan and reflections from the Gathering that align with this pillar.

BREATHING LIFE: NATIONAL PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS

Justice

- Establish a national investigative taskforce to review or reopen cold case investigations involving First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQA+ People (Calls for Justice 5.6, 5.8, 9.5, 9.6).
- Establish a National Indigenous Human Rights Ombudsperson and National Indigenous Human Rights Tribunal, in partnership with the federal government, provincial/territorial governments, and First Nations (Calls for Justice 1.7, 5.1, 5.12, 9.5).



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- Ensure appropriate funding of Gladue² reporting to ensure First Nations access (Calls for Justice 5.13, 5.15, 5.16, 5.17).
- Support to revitalize traditional and customary laws within First Nations jurisdictions (Calls for Justice 5.11, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5).
- Enhancing and respecting self-governance models within First Nations to provide support for families and survivors (Calls for Justice 5.11).
- Amend the Criminal Code of Canada to make [a victim's] "Indigenous identity" an aggravating factor when charging or sentencing accused (Call for Justice 5.14, 5.15, 5.16, 5.18).
- Increase funding for First Nations justice initiatives, restorative justice, and culturally appropriate victim offender treatment programs (Calls for Justice 5.16, 5.21).

Policing

Create independent, third-party oversight bodies for all police forces across the country that are accountable to the First Nations and First Nations citizens they serve (Calls for Justice 5.7, 9.6, 9.8, 9.9).

- Federal government to review and strengthen its human trafficking law and support law enforcement in counteracting the rise in international human trafficking rings (Calls for Justice 8.1).
- Ensure that police respond to calls involving a First Nations person going missing or being murdered in a culturally sensitive manner and understanding the contributing factors that cause missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People (Calls for Justice 5.5, 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.5).
- Police forces across the country be required to stop using "mug shots" of Indigenous women on missing posters (Calls for Justice 15.6).
- Support crime prevention that addresses risks and protective measures (Calls for Justice 9.7).
- Police forces in Canada to acknowledge the colonial violence they have inflicted against First Nations and commit to accountability measures (Calls for Justice 9.1, 9.5, 9.7).
- Police forces in Canada to develop and implement programs, with First Nations, that promote positive working relationships and trust with First Nations and First Nations citizens (Calls for Justice 9.2, 9.7).

² Gladue reports and plans contain information on the unique circumstances of Aboriginal Peoples accused of an offence or Aboriginal offenders. The court can consider these reports during sentencing. Sentencing in Gladue court focuses on restorative justice and community justice programs, while also making sure that offenders receive fair sentences.



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REFLECTIONS FROM THE GATHERING

Safe Policing

Multiple survivors and families expressed concern over police brutality and racism, holding they have no trust in the police. It was suggested that there should be consequences for police turning off bodycams, and mental health competency training for officers. Multiple survivors and families advised more accountability in policing is needed, and police should be safe and approachable. One survivor/family member suggested creating a model of Elder-accompanied wellness checks. Some survivors and families noted that not all police officers are bad.

Court Supports for Survivors and Families

Survivors and families held that justice for MMIWG2S+ is “a myth, legend, and story”; nobody ever experiences justice.³ Even when a perpetrator is caught and punished, the court process is traumatizing and sentences are too lenient, especially in comparison to the losses experienced by survivors and families. In addition to upholding many of the Calls for Justice and justice priorities in *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice*, survivors and families made other suggestions on areas for continued legal advocacy within the justice system.

Many survivors and families called for advocacy and navigation of supports for women seeking justice in the courts for violence—one survivor shared that the court experience was just as bad as their assault.⁴ Survivors and families suggested that many MMIWG2S+ survivors feel unable to seek legal recourse due to different barriers, including language and lack of clarity regarding process.

Supports for family members should be embedded within the justice system. For example, one survivor/family member suggested that those who have a murdered loved one have an opportunity to hear the statement of facts against the accused prior to being in the courtroom (e.g., in a meeting with the Crown). Survivors and families held that it is unfair and traumatizing to first hear the details of a loved one’s death in such a public forum, particularly when the Crown calls graphic evidence.

Sentencing

Survivors and families spoke about perpetrators having their sentences reduced for “good behaviour” despite having committed multiple murders. This is especially impactful for those living in small communities, who will certainly encounter the individual who has harmed them or their loved one once they are released. Further, a survivor/family member put forward that justice for pregnant women and their babies is lacking as perpetrators are not held responsible for the death of unborn spirits.

³ Creation of community-based spaces to increase access to justice is an AFN action item under “wrap-around” services in *Breathing Life*.

⁴ Funding for Elder or family accompaniment for survivors providing evidence or giving statements, and for families searching for missing loved ones is an AFN action item under “wrap-around” services in *Breathing Life*. Increased access to First National legal advocates is an AFN action item under “wrap-around” services in *Breathing Life*.



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First Nations-Led System

One family member suggested a more overarching solution of uniting multiple First Nations to assert sovereign rights and create an entirely new and separate justice system and government. This family member put forward that the AFN can uphold Indigenous rights and its mandate(s) to continue with MMIWG2S+ advocacy and prevention. Multiple families expressed concerns around the AFN and Indigenous organizations “gatekeeping” resources related to MMIWG2S+—the government is pitting Indigenous Peoples against one another.

Respect for Loved Ones: Landfill Excavation

Survivors and families called attention to the Brady Landfill that families advocated to (temporarily) close following the discovery of the remains of an Indigenous woman.⁵ Survivors and families held that the government(s)⁶ need(s) to conduct a proper search for more bodies. Survivors and Elders are indicating that a mass grave exists at the landfill and Survivors and Elders need to be respected and believed. A search could uncover more bodies that can be returned to families. Survivors and families held that there are other landfills that are mass graves and should be excavated.⁷

Respect for Loved Ones: Cause of Death

Multiple families and survivors expressed concern over coroners properly conducting their work; families stated that coroners came to incorrect conclusions following autopsies. For example, one survivor/family member noted a coroner ignoring signs of drugging and assault and instead focusing on “exposure” as a cause of death. Families and survivors also noted that “death by misadventure” is being too commonly used. According to survivors and families, police are not properly investigating deaths and lawyers are apathetic.

Respect for Loved Ones: Identification

One survivor/family member recommended providing access to dentistry for women and creating a database of dental records, should a coroner require them; this would improve investigations and reduce unidentified bodies. Another survivor/family member suggested an identity bracelet program. The ability to identify bodies creates more opportunity for justice in criminal cases. This also allows families to return their loved ones home, providing some closure for those experiencing great loss.

Compassionate Process

One family member shared a concern regarding release of the bodies of deceased loved ones. This family member suggested they should be able to assert authority when a government is holding loved one’s bodies, especially where cultural teachings/protocol need to be followed. Families have limited jurisdiction to ask for their loved one’s body to be released. A family member also flagged that sensitivity should be considered when returning a deceased loved one’s items/property⁸—families should not have to pick these items up at a courier depot.

5 The remains of two Indigenous women have been found at the Brady Landfill; their alleged killer has also been charged with the deaths of two additional women (one confirmed First Nations, one unidentified).

6 Municipal, provincial, and/or federal.

7 Families were offered a monument at a landfill as a gesture, but it is felt that suggesting families visit the landfill to remember their loved ones was shameful and degrades the significance of their losses.

8 This may be the responsibility of the police or the coroner/pathologist/Solicitor General Office, depending on the case.



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HUMAN SECURITY

What follows are the Human Security National Priority Action Items from AFN's *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* Action Plan and reflections from the Gathering that align with this pillar.

BREATHING LIFE: NATIONAL PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS

- Reducing the marginalization of Indigenous women and girls by improving socioeconomic development and outcomes (Calls for Justice 1.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 8.1).
- Implement a national campaign targeted to industry and resource extraction companies to ensure safety and respect of First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People on the job site (Calls for Justice 13.1, 13.3, 13.4, 15.6).
- Support the increase in capacity of First Nations to produce their own food and provide for basic needs to promote social security, especially for northern and remote First Nations (Calls for Justice 4.1, 4.2).
- Increased access to transportation, emergency services, and improved infrastructure so emergency calls from northern and remote First Nations are responded to (Calls for Justice 4.8).
- Utilize technology to better track movements or track location of First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+, in accordance with privacy laws and regulations (Calls for Justice 1.5).

REFLECTIONS FROM THE GATHERING

Review and Revision of Government Policies

Survivors and families noted that racist policies marginalize Indigenous Peoples and undermine Indigenous Peoples' human rights to security. A survivor/family member suggested a review of government policies currently in place with consideration for the real outcomes or consequences for MMIWG2S+. Presenters for CIRNAC indicated that a review is underway, however, the presenter did not provide specific details. One survivor/family member suggested replacing the *Indian Act* with Women's Councils in communities and at regional and national levels.

Supportive and Preventative Infrastructure

Survivors and families stressed that improving women's, girls', and 2SLGBTQIA+ People's socio-economic conditions can help prevent MMIWG2S+. For example, free (and safe) transportation and free childcare can greatly improve the safety and security of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ Peoples. Many MMIWG2S+ cases are related to the challenges faced by women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People travelling alone and a lack of public transportation infrastructure in and between communities. One survivor/family member suggested that free childcare opens opportunities that mothers may not otherwise have, including jobs and education.



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A livable income, which brings food security, is key to lifting mothers out of poverty and ensuring they can meet their children's and their own security needs. Survivors and families indicated that building up parents and youth will solve many problems. According to one survivor/family member, solutions for building up caregivers include supports for children, such as a Jordon's Principle worker in every community who is also connected with childcare options.

As a preventative measure for MMIWG2S+, families and survivors indicated after hours services are needed for families and caregivers as child wellness services are unsafe. A dedicated team needs to be in place to respond and intervene with resources and services to support caregivers without shaming, judgement, or the threat of children being removed if a primary caregiver is absent.

Women need the option to remain at home with their children to be spiritually balanced, but they may need support to properly care for their children. Survivors and families suggested that supports for child wellness should keep the children in their home, while removing caregivers to get help if needed. Losing children to the colonial child wellness system will contribute to additional MMIWG2S+ cases.

Housing and Safety

A survivor/family member noted housing occupancy limits/policies result in children being removed and families split up. Safe and available housing in communities is needed to ensure women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People are not vulnerable to family or systemic violence.

One survivor/family member suggested that human security concerns could also be addressed through initiatives such as tiny homes for safe sleeping and traditional lunch/food programs. A women's safety program was also suggested by a survivor/family member.

Search Technology

One survivor and family member suggested GPS tracking jewelry for locating loved ones, as well as a call-in system that is a best practice.⁹ In addition to providing a starting point for searches, call-in registrants can be cross-referenced by families looking for loved ones. This system has successfully reunited families.

One survivor/family member suggested distributing unique 'ink' bracelets¹⁰ to aid family and police efforts in searches and with court cases. Everbridge, an alert system, has been implemented by the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'Kmaq and has successfully reunited a missing teenager with her family. Similar emergency technology shared includes Aboriginal Alert (an Indigenous awareness network) and the RESCU application.

Notably, poor police response may still be a concern with some of these opportunities for creating security. Another survivor/family noted that policing in Northern communities needs to be better resourced—in one Manitoba community, RCMP calls are routed to a community in British Columbia.

⁹ The call-in system has people registering a unique identification number that is called-in periodically to provide a last known time and location.

¹⁰ Women can activate ink bracelets to mark an area if attacked to provide a last known location or proof of attack.



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Industry Blame and Responsibility

Survivors and families reiterated the need for industry accountability for exploiting Indigenous women, especially from resource extraction companies with camps in the North. One survivor/family member noted some company leadership is too far removed from what is going on in the camps and have/had no idea of the harms being committed—more awareness and advocacy is needed.

Some Indigenous organizational representatives at the Gathering noted having a lineup of abused women coming from 'man camps' every morning to seek support. Additionally, one survivor/family member expressed concerns about the inappropriate use of laws (e.g., Bill 1/The Critical Infrastructure Bill in Alberta) to penalize grassroots protesters, including many Indigenous women, standing up to corporations and government.

Accountability to 60'S Scoop Survivors

One survivor/family member spoke to a need for the AFN and First Nations communities to embrace disenfranchised 60s Scoop survivors. Many First Nations girls have been displaced to urban settings as Indigenous women with no supports after leaving abusive homes or 'aging out.' These individuals should have connections to First Nations communities that can help them to heal. Many of these women are suffer from substance misuse and addictions. The 60s Scoop has been a significant contributing factor to MMIWG2S+ and its survivors need to be accepted into communities, regardless of their ability to prove membership.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

What follows are the Health and Wellness National Priority Action Items from AFN's Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice Action Plan and reflections from the Gathering that align with this pillar.

BREATHING LIFE: NATIONAL PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS

- Services and programs serving First Nations must be culturally appropriate, trauma informed, understand addictions, and employ harm reduction strategies, and must be designed from the perspective of First Nations being served (Calls for Justice 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3).
- Design and implement a First Nations Health and Wellness Strategy for children of MMIWG2S+ to ensure they have culturally appropriate wellness support and healing practices (Calls for Justice 3.7).
- Increase access to aftercare services, which includes culturally appropriate healing practices and grief counselling (Calls for Justice 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 7.2).
- Improve prevention programming and responses to violence within intimate relationships and families (Calls for Justice 3.3, 3.4, 5.3, 7.2).
- Funding for First Nations women's centres, shelters, treatment facilities, and other safe spaces for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People (Calls for Justice 7.2, 7.4).



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- Increased access to culturally appropriate mental and emotional health support for First Nations men and boys (Calls for Justice 7.2, 7.3).
- Increase the number of First Nations social workers available in hospitals to help navigate the health care system and advocate for First Nations patients (Calls for Justice 3.1).
- Services and programs serving First Nations must be culturally appropriate, trauma informed, understand addictions, and employ harm reduction strategies, and must be designed from the First Nations perspectives that are being served (Calls for Justice 3.6).

REFLECTIONS FROM THE GATHERING

Healing

One survivor/family member noted that two days for this Gathering of survivors and families was not enough time and that a gathering purely for coming together and healing should be hosted. The survivor/family member felt that, at a minimum, an entire day should be allotted for sharing and listening with everyone having a voice and a place. Survivors and families noted that rather than bringing people together nationally, healing forums and engagements could be done regionally. Survivors and families also recommended healing circles for families left out of the Inquiry, as this exclusion worsened hurt and harm; such healing circles could be done in communities, rather than regionally or nationally.

Shelters and Other Safety

Women remain in dangerous and abusive situations due to a lack of housing and survivors and families suggested more shelters and housing for women be established.¹¹ The shelters that do exist need more beds, especially low-barrier beds.¹² One survivor/family member noted that they could never sustain a shelter in their community as misogyny runs too deep and any workers or supporters would be scared off by violent community members. For these communities, transportation out of community to a safe place is needed.

Men and Boys

Multiple survivors and families called for supports for men and boys in MMIWG2S+ initiatives. Many men and boys are impacted by MMIWG2S+. These men and boys have lost their grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, and daughters and feel the effects of that trauma and loss directly and intergenerationally. It can be difficult for men to find change despite being family of MMIWG2S+ and it is especially necessary for boys who have grown up having lost their mothers.

One family member expressed concern that men are being put down in conversations around MMIWG2S+ and that men's roles in MMIWG2S+ need to be spoken about in a better way—many men are advocates and supporters.

¹¹ Increased support services, especially for survivors of family violence, including safe houses, financial aid, transportation, and legal services is an AFN action item under "wrap-around" services in *Breathing Life*.

¹² Low-barrier shelters/beds have few requirements for entry (e.g., identification, refraining from substance use, following rigid curfews) and often use an overall harm reduction approach.



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According to this family member, it is important for healing that all Indigenous Peoples, not just females and 2Spirit People, walk together to strategically make change.

Youth

Survivors and families emphasized turning to youth and ensuring that youth are getting supports to attend ceremony and gatherings. Youth also need therapy, support, and aftercare when healing from trauma. Children of MMIWG2S+ are heavily impacted and need support. Survivors and families felt that if girls and boys are protected today, it can prevent harm and more trauma in the future.

Gender Inequity

One survivor/family member expressed concern over gender inequity for gender diverse individuals because they felt that 2Spirit men are dominating the 2Spirit conversation (gender-based violence) and have the focus of HIV/AIDS, when women have increasing infection rates and experience misogyny.

Focused/Distinctive Approach to MMIWG2S+

One survivor/family member suggested that thought be put into creating distinct groups as the MMIWG2S+ conversation is overwhelming and retraumatizing for some survivors and families who are healing. A focused approach would be helpful as the current approach has missing, murdered (solved and unsolved), survivors of violence, and gender diverse people all 'lumped' together. Everyone's experience is different, and each person has their own challenges and needs. A focused approach would allow for forums and engagements to be designed around unique needs. Notably, some survivors and families have multiple impacted loved ones and may not easily fit into one group.

CULTURE

What follows are the Culture National Priority Action Items from AFN's *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* Action Plan and reflections from the Gathering that align with this pillar.

BREATHING LIFE: NATIONAL PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS

Culture as Prevention

- Provide dedicated funding for First Nations schools and programming to support learning First Nations cultures and First Nations languages so children have opportunity to build strong cultural identities (Calls for Justice 2.2, 2.3).
- Provide dedicated funding for no-barrier programming supporting access to First Nations culture and First Nations language for adults, both on-reserve and living in urban centres (Calls for Justice 2.2, 2.3, 3.4).
- Provide dedicated funding to support preservation of cultural knowledge including First Nations customs, traditional knowledge, societal roles, and languages (Calls for Justice 2.2, 2.4, 2.5).



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- Support mainstream public education reform to provide a better understanding of First Nations culture and the contributing factors that cause MMIWG2S+ (Calls for Justice 1.9, 2.6, 6.1, 11.1, 11.2, 15.1, 15.2, 15.5, 15.6, 15.7).
- Design and implement a campaign raising public awareness aimed at changing attitudes that devalue Indigenous women and girls and the contributions of First Nations as an educational tool for violence prevention (Calls for Justice 1.9, 2.6, 6.1, 11.1, 11.2, 15.1, 15.2, 15.3, 15.6).

Healing with Culture

- Provide adequate funding to First Nations to develop their own culturally appropriate and land-based healing programs for the benefit of MMIWG2S+ survivors and family and all First Nations citizens affected by trauma (Calls for Justice 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4).
- Increase access to culturally appropriate healing services and activities in urban centres (Calls for Justice 2.3, 2.5, 3.1, 3.2, 3.6).
- Evaluate questions being asked of First Nations people when accessing programs and services, with thought towards cultural sensitivity and understanding contributing factors to MMIWG2S+ (Calls for Justice 2.6).
- Design and implement ongoing training for all government employees to understand the contributing factors that cause MMIWG2S+ and cultural sensitivity to better respond to the needs of First Nations (Calls for Justice 2.6).

Culture as Safety

- Provide adequate funding for independent and culturally appropriate First Nations victim services (Calls for Justice 9.8).
- Provide adequate funding for cultural and spiritual supports to ensure that Knowledge Keepers providing services are also properly supported (Calls for Justice 2.3, 7.1, 7.2).
- Increased access to First Nations interpreters and translation services to improve access to health and wellness, and justice, and when dealing with police during investigations (Calls for Justice 2.2, 7.5).
- Ensure First Nations experiencing traumatic events have access to and ongoing support from a crisis response team in a culturally appropriate way (Calls for Justice 3.5).
- Provide targeted funding for culturally appropriate prevention and healing programs for survivors of human trafficking (Calls for Justice 8.1).

REFLECTIONS FROM THE GATHERING

Community-Led Solutions

Survivors and families advocated for communities to make decisions around their needs and for culturally fitting solutions to come from communities. Governments and other organizations must consider unique community needs



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and culturally appropriate approaches when allotting resources. One survivor/family member noted that large amounts of funds have been misspent in their community due to a lack of engagement or consultation (i.e., a detox centre without aftercare).

Healing Lodges and Camps

Survivors and families supported the priorities from *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice*, such as healing camps with the added suggestion that the number and size of camps be based on population and that funding for ongoing operations be considered. Additionally, survivors and families called for both healing lodges and treatment centres in communities. One specific suggestion was for ‘family immersion camps,’ where difficult conversations are held and supported around past and present abuses and incest without shame. The goal is for families to come out healed and on a good path to ending cycles of trauma.

Another survivor/family member advocated for focus on uplifting and healing for mothers that will bring significant change because they are raising the next generation; for this individual, funding should be dedicated to practices such as moon lodges so that women can “know our ways.”

Survivors and families highlighted that waitlists for healing opportunities to deal with trauma are unacceptable and individuals are dying while waiting for help.¹³ In addition, one survivor/family member stressed that there is a great need for recovery houses for individuals transitioning from hospitals.

Culturally Based Education

One survivor/family stressed a need to address racism in the school system. Additionally, survivors and families suggested future wellness can be developed by educating youth on human rights, misogyny, and healthy communication. The worth of women needs to be taught to boys and girls.

Invoking Culture to End Lateral Violence

Incorporating culture into all gatherings, tables, and conversations creates safety for everyone involved. As there is potential for lateral violence in communities, survivors and families noted that education, awareness, and advocacy to prevent lateral violence is needed. Incorporating culture and traditional ways in these efforts is important—lateral violence goes against traditional teachings. Similarly, survivors and families noted occurrences, such as community members not sharing what they know about MMIWG2S+ cases out of fear. Survivors and families shared that the misogyny and toxicity in communities that contributes to MMIWG2S+ needs to be addressed; this can be done through invoking cultural teachings.

Accessibility for Grassroots Efforts

Multiple grassroots organizational representatives shared that they are working to ensure cultural experiences, such as lodges and ceremony, are accessible in communities. Grassroots organizations need support to qualify for funding to obtain non-profit designations and to cover costs, such as liability insurance for gatherings. Grassroots organizations are forced to operate within these colonial parameters, but funders do not normally consider these additional costs.

¹³ Due to self-medicating (substance use or overdosing) and poor mental wellness (suicide).



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Survivors and family members held that many grassroots advocates are burnt out and asked the AFN for help to advocate on their behalf.

Religious Inclusivity

One survivor/family member highlighted that while cultural supports are important, Christian, or other religious denominations should have space at MMIWG2S+ events. This survivor/family member also noted that survivors and families who do not follow traditional beliefs should have access to appropriate resources for their trauma.

Public Education

A survivor/family member expressed concerns over immigrants/newcomers to Canada having no idea of the rights and history of Indigenous Peoples as the First People. To mitigate this, it was suggested that advocacy by the AFN should include education and citizenship test questions around Indigenous Peoples.

IMPLEMENTATION

During the regional engagements with survivors and families, the AFN heard three main areas that need to be considered for implementing the Calls for Justice:

- Jurisdictional Challenges
- Resources and Services
- Reporting and Tracking

JURISDICTIONAL CHALLENGES

What follows is a summary of Jurisdictional Challenges from *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* followed by aligning reflections that were shared at the Gathering.

BREATHING LIFE

Interjurisdictional cooperation among federal, provincial/territorial, and First Nations government is needed. All levels of government must partner with first Nations. Within MMIWG2S+ conversations, interjurisdictional neglect refers to what causes groups or individuals to “fall through the cracks.”¹⁴ Solutions need to focus on closing those gaps by remedying access to services on- and off-reserve, using a distinctions-based approach to implementation.

¹⁴ See *Reclaiming Power and Place: The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (vol 1(a)).



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REFLECTIONS FROM THE GATHERING

Regional 'Hubs'

Many survivors and families spoke about not being involved in, or even knowing about, the MMIWG Inquiry at the time it was being carried out. This is in addition to being left out of the regional engagement sessions for the AFN's *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* report. Many survivors and families who have been and continue to be public about their experiences, are unclear on why they are being left out. They are frustrated that this is the case. It was suggested regional 'hubs' be created for survivors and families to ensure they are included in future initiatives and have access to available supports. Survivors and families suggested a regional approach will be less likely to exclude survivors and families, but more regional coordinators are needed to make it work.

According to some organizational representatives at the Gathering, there are 'lists' of survivors and families at varying geographic and political levels, but they do not seem to be inclusive.¹⁵ It is unclear who has the responsibility or jurisdiction to contact families and ensure they are included. According to survivors and families, the best approach may be to use regional or provincial entities that feed into a national list.

Geographic Inclusivity

Multiple survivors and families from the North felt that the North was forgotten in the MMIWG2S+ Inquiry and in some regional engagements because it is difficult to get to. This points to a need for a direct focus on survivors and families without transportation and internet—there are many unheard voices.

Survivors and families from Nova Scotia expressed similar issues particular to their region. A survivor/family member from British Columbia stressed that the Highway of Tears extends past Prince Rupert to Haida Gwaii, indicating that Western, coastal, and remote communities impacted by MMIWG2S+ have been excluded. Further, Québec survivors and families feel they are often left out due to a lack of Francophone translation and flagged that political and legal differences are evident and isolating when sharing experiences with survivors and families from other regions. Québec has unique issues, with more services needed in English as well as French. Forgotten families need more representation and advocacy at organizational and political levels.

Direct-to-Family Supports

Survivors and families suggested that funding coming from the federal government for families who are searching for missing loved ones should go directly to the families, bypassing Chief and Council. Political entities create jurisdictional barriers for families due to geographic/community funding allotments.¹⁶ Some survivors and families find that MMIWG2S+ and child wellness money is accessed by Chiefs organizations and is not getting to families—smaller organizations apply for funding only to be told their region's portion has already been distributed to Band Councils.

¹⁵ There seems to be confusion around MMIWG2S+ statistics and it was pointed out how difficult it is to find what you do not know—a better national picture would be helpful.

¹⁶ It was also suggested that too many entities are making money from MMIWG2S+.



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Coordinated/Cross-Jurisdictional Search Efforts

When a First Nations woman goes missing after traveling to an urban setting, it becomes difficult to navigate responsibility for supporting the search with urban police and First Nations or RCMP both being involved. Survivors and families indicated services, resources, and best practices must be shared across jurisdictions. According to families and survivors, geographic boundaries for First Nations supporters, workers, and funding are arbitrary and unnecessarily prevent connections and timely assistance. Currently, the MMIWG2S+ movement is very siloed and must be united. One survivor/family member held this is especially true between urban and on-reserve organizers who often find themselves pitted against one another in competition for funding despite both working for the same purpose.

Full Government Accountability

Survivors, families, and presenters pointed to divided departmental responsibilities within the federal government being a problem. The federal government must take a whole-of-government approach to MMIWG2S+. It is important that MMIWG2S+ conversations include all relevant departments and appropriate decision-makers. A number of federal departments are involved in MMIWG2S+ programs, policies, and initiatives. However, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) generally take the lead on MMIWG2S+ conversations, often without other departments present. Without other departments present, CIRNAC and ISC are frequently unable to provide adequate information on initiatives outside of their respective departments. Further, MMIWG2S+ advocates are forced to rely on CIRNAC and ISC to relay conversations back to other departments, which often results in miscommunications.¹⁷

RESOURCES AND SERVICES

What follows is a brief summary of Resources and Services from *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* followed by aligning reflections that were shared at the Gathering.

BREATHING LIFE

First Nations women who leave their communities in search of services and resources not available in their community are vulnerable to gender-based violence. The lack of services and resources and higher cost of living in remote First Nations reflects inequity that requires remedying. The socio-economic marginalization of all First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People puts them at greater risk for violence.

Note: Much of what was shared by families at the Gathering desperately trying to locate their loved ones focused on the current situation, rather than what could have prevented their loss. *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* uses a more preventative lens, noting a need for efforts to create equity for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+

¹⁷ The Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Marc Miller provided a pre-recorded message/greeting for the Gathering and many survivors and family members found this disrespectful. These survivors and families felt that Minister Miller should have been present and listening. Survivors and families also felt that if the Prime Minister was present and hearing survivors and families, more would be done.



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Peoples; some of these are noted in topics above. The following reflections focus on resources and services families in First Nation communities require as they continue extensive, prolonged, and painful searches.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE GATHERING

Immediate and Long-Term Funding for Families Searching

Many families called for to access resources for their search efforts immediately after a loved one goes missing.¹⁸ Survivors and families emphasized that current search-related funding requires families to 'qualify' and takes two weeks to receive.¹⁹ The first few days are often crucial to finding a loved one, so there must be accountability for government funders (First Nations, regional, or federal) for easy and immediate access to resources. Families are often in a state of shock and need this process to be transparent, sensitive, and streamlined. Further, survivors and families called for funding that does not 'run out' after a certain amount allotted or rigid timeframe. Families indicated supports for a child's death or disappearance function like Employment Insurance but are limited to one family member and cannot support multiple family members who must take time away from work to grieve or search (at the time of writing \$500 per week for 3 years). According to families, it is impossible to go to work while in that state of shock and exhaustion. Families called for immediate and ongoing funding to cover costs including poster printing, food and gas (for volunteers as well), and tobacco for Elders.

One survivor/family member questioned why the Indian Trust Fund is not being drawn on to ensure resources and services are being made available. It is concerning that survivors, families, and organizations are being pitted against each other in competition for resources and services.

¹⁸ Toolkits or information kits for families in crisis is an AFN action item under "wrap-around" services in *Breathing Life*. Family Information Liaison Units provide specialized services to MMIWG2S+ families and seem to be under resourced as many families at the Gathering are not feeling supported.

¹⁹ Not many details were provided about the funding/benefits being referred to. These may differ across First Nations and regions. One federal program is the Canadian Benefit for Parents of Young Victims of Crime Program: [https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/ei/ei-list/ei-employers-parents-young-victims-crime.html#:~:text=From%3A%20Employment%20and%20Social%20Development%20Canada&text=The%20benefit%20provides%20eligible%20parents,\(the%20Income%20Support%20Period\)](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/ei/ei-list/ei-employers-parents-young-victims-crime.html#:~:text=From%3A%20Employment%20and%20Social%20Development%20Canada&text=The%20benefit%20provides%20eligible%20parents,(the%20Income%20Support%20Period).).



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Automatic Supports for Families Searching

Survivors and families suggested that a notification system should be in place for regional supporters who can offer resources to families as soon as a loved one is reported missing. This may include a support person dispatched to help onsite; however, the jurisdictional logistics of this set up are uncertain among advocates. Jurisdiction becomes especially complicated where traditional territory boundaries cross provincial and territorial ones.

One organizational representative shared that they are explicitly prohibited from directly contacting families. This troublesome colonial funding constraint is currently being challenged. Further, regional representatives acknowledged that resource accessibility needs to be balanced with respect for families who do not want their situation made public.²⁰ However, families should be informed of what is available to them regardless of their decision to use it.

If the notification system is not developed, there should be a local or regional contact/organization for families to receive support in their search in terms of strategy and resource navigation. According to survivors and families, there should be a single organization—one number—that can be contacted to provide wraparound resources for survivors and families. This should also include supports and advocacy when a loved one is found based on unique outcomes. For those who find their loved one has passed, there should be funding for burial, ceremony, and any additional cultural protocol needed. Multiple families and survivors noted how the compounding hurt contributes to addictions, poor health, and additional deaths for already grieving families.

Resource Clarity for Families Searching

Survivors and families noted that there are some communities with funds available locally. However, more communication is needed because families indicated that they do not know about and are not accessing these funds. Among families and survivors, this raises the question: “why don’t families know where to get resources?”

Survivors and families highlighted that more access for grassroots organizations made up of survivors and families operating out of reserves (not just urban centres) is needed. The lack of on-reserve services and resources results in two separate issues: first, women leave their home in First Nations due, in part, to a lack of services, which can result in increased exposure to danger; and second, if these women go missing, families require supports that are not always available on reserve to search. These dynamics create issues in accessing supports (i.e., families on reserve struggle to navigate urban resources in their search), and jurisdictional issues when on-reserve and urban police forces are both involved.

Survivors and families held that many First Nations women leave the North for a better life,²¹ but the hurt they carry brings them to a life where they are lost in survival of addictions and poverty, and it is difficult for their families to locate them.

²⁰ Support for families dealing with media scrutiny and for trauma informed media practices is an AFN action item under “wrap-around” services in *Breathing Life*.

²¹ Increased victim support services in remote communities is an AFN action item under “wrap-around” services in *Breathing Life*.



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Robust Search Resources

One survivor/family member suggested that many resources and services that are accessible to non-Indigenous families when searching for a loved one are not available to Indigenous families. Search and rescue methods, such as infrared technology and search (or cadaver) dogs, need to be accessible to all Indigenous communities—access should be timely, and costs should not be covered by families.

Many families recounted begging for resources and fundraising on their own, which should not be their focus when searching. Rather than facing additional challenges, survivors and families should be wrapped in supports, including widely available 24/7 mental health interventions.²²

Lumping survivors and families into one MMIWG2S+ category causes overlap and challenges with obtaining services for unique situations. One survivor/family member suggested that the missing must be prioritized because there is still hope for safe return, with unsolved cases being secondary.

REPORTING AND TRACKING

What follows is a brief summary of Reporting and Tracking from *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* followed by aligning reflections that were shared at the Gathering.

BREATHING LIFE

Service providers are burdened with reporting requirements to funders that limit how funds can be used, leaving them unable to always meet client needs—especially culturally. Further, there are concerns with organizational mandates acting as barriers for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ Peoples seeking services from non-Indigenous organizations, despite MMIWG2S+ funding going to such organizations. Improved reporting and tracking mechanisms for entities receiving funding are needed to ensure MMIWG2S+ and First Nations-specific services and resources are reaching the correct population.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE GATHERING

Accountability for MMIWG2S+ Funds

An ongoing theme of discussion at the Gathering was funding accountability, including reporting and tracking outcomes. There were multiple national and regional presentations speaking to the need for accountability and transparency, which shared exact funding amounts received and spent. Many survivors and families felt that despite these large amounts of money being dedicated to MMIWG2S+ initiatives, a lack of impact is felt on the ground level.

²² One survivor/family member suggested this be similar to Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program Crisis Line. Hope for Wellness, a culturally competent telephone and online chat is available to all Indigenous Peoples across Canada but is not specific to MMIWG2S+ survivors and family.



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Families and survivors held that any entity receiving MMIWG2S+ funding should be accountable for how they are spending the funds. Survivors and families noted that very few community programs offered by Bands are gender-based or specific to MMIWG2S+. More gender-based programming is needed, especially when funds are tied to MMIWG2S+ efforts. More accountability and transparency from on-reserve leadership are needed.

Accessible MMIWG2S+ Funding

Some organizational representatives who have received funding spoke to the colonial restrictions placed on resources and difficult reporting requirements that take away from their work; some are drowning in paperwork rather than helping. Survivors and families suggested advocacy and capacity are needed to support entities working on the ground.

Additionally, one survivor/family member noted funding requirements are especially cumbersome for individuals living with disabilities and those wanting to do small initiatives. Individuals face challenges in reporting on intangible impacts, like emotional healing, and find it impractical to follow up with participants to measure progress without adding to their trauma (tracking). These are recurring requirements of government-templated reporting. Survivors and families suggested simple cultural programs, such as a skirt making session, become unwieldy for small community leaders to host, despite having a large impact on healing. As one survivor/family member noted, “voices are lost trying to fit into funding criteria.”

Criteria, reporting requirements, and fund management processes are very colonial. Requirements need to be reasonable for grassroots or bottom-up efforts to adhere to.

Funding Transparency

Survivors and families expressed difficulty in knowing and understanding who makes funding decisions within their regions. Survivors, families, and grassroots organizations are unclear on who is making these decisions, how many application adjudicators are involved, and what locations adjudicators come from. One survivor/family member spoke of this issue in the context of concerns over inequitable funding across a province with diverse needs between its Northern, Central, and Southern regions. According to survivors and families, large amounts of money are being allocated in all provinces and territories, but not all survivors and families are feeling or seeing the effects, despite being engaged. More transparency is needed regarding the route funds are taking to support families; funders and entities receiving funds should be more accountable to families and communities. Further, one survivor/family member noted funding opportunities are not being advertised widely enough by funders and that applications have short windows, making it difficult for smaller groups to apply.



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ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is noted in *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* as a key area of development for ensuring the Calls for Justice are actioned. What follows is a brief summary of Accountability from *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* followed by aligning reflections that were shared at the Gathering.

BREATHING LIFE

All governments (federal, provincial/territorial, and First Nations) must be accountable to the people they serve and are responsible for implementing the Calls for Justice. This includes the Calls to develop independent mechanisms to report on implementing the Calls for Justice. Government accountability should be directly linked to survivors, families, and First Nations communities. A data management strategy and transparent accountability frameworks that record undertaken and outstanding actions noting timeframes, partners, indicators, objectives, and responsibility for monitoring are needed.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE GATHERING

Inclusion of Survivors and Families

Survivors and families suggested that MMIWG2S+ should not be just another portfolio for government and other stakeholders. Rather than merely being accountable to survivors and families, more survivors and families with lived experience should be included in crucial decision-making roles. Passion fuels survivors and families to continue advocating and ensures they are asking the right questions and speaking from a genuine place.

Further, survivors and families held that including family in MMIWG2S+ conversations is respectful and necessary for ensuring loved ones receive proper advocacy. This should be considered in creating any accountability mechanisms, ombudsperson office,²³ and independent oversight bodies²⁴—some or all seats and/or appointments should be set aside for survivors and families (grassroots public appointments).

Another survivor/family member held families can advocate in ways that organizations and politically tied individuals cannot; they are able to express themselves more freely without concern over possibly losing their jobs or positions. However, survivors and families do not have the same access to decision-making tables and do need organizational and political advocacy to gain access to impactful spaces.

²³ A National Indigenous Human Rights Tribunal and Ombudsperson are recommended in *Breathing Life* and is a current project of the Government of Canada.

²⁴ An optional discussion around an Independent Oversight Body was held the evening of February 14. It was suggested that this was a good start, but more conversations need to be held.



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Power and Influence for Independent Entities

One survivor/family member expressed concern that current ombudsperson offices, such as the Office of the Correctional Investigator for federally sentenced offenders, have no powers to institute change—ombudsperson offices investigate and release troubling reports, but nothing happens. Mechanisms put in place for MMIWG2S+ need to have sufficient power to influence change, such as policy reform or program implementation. Further, one survivor/family member suggested that instituting a single national office may be geographically impossible to manage—a regional approach may make more sense.

One survivor/family member suggested that the CIRNAC MMIWG2S+ Secretariat be made into a standalone Task Force of family members with forensic expertise, subpoena powers, and legislative reform powers. This individual held that it should not just be representatives from organizations speaking on behalf of survivors and families, but families and survivors speaking on their own behalf. The Task Force should also be entirely non-political. The survivor/family member suggested looking to tribes in the United States where Task Forces have powers to offer support along with independence from the federal government. Whatever form it takes, survivors and families deserve to know the metrics of decisions regarding an ombudsperson office and any other independent entities.

Evidence of Change/Meangingful Consultation

Many survivors and families spoke to how long they have been advocating with no real change and the federal government not being held accountable for continued MMIWG2S+ cases. Survivors and families acknowledged that the balance between fast-tracking the work and reduced engagement opportunities is challenging. One survivor/family member suggested streamlining discussions using directed questions for families to respond to, rather than having extensive in-person engagements. Survivors and families held that they should not have to be pushing so hard to have their voices heard.

Funding Transparency and Evident Outcomes

One survivor/family member suggested that to improve government and organizational reports that include data and spending be easily accessible online and in print to improve accountability. Survivors and families should be mailed copies, especially in communities with poor internet connectivity. Further, reports should be written using plain language with literacy levels, accessibility for those living with disabilities, and traditional language speakers in mind.

Ethical Accountability

Survivors and families held that in addition accountability for spending and actioning the Calls for Justice, organizations need to be held accountable for being safe—culturally, and otherwise. Many survivors and families noted that some abusive and toxic individuals are supported by organizations nationally and in various communities. It is especially important that entities supporting MMIWG2S+ efforts and prevention end connections with known perpetrators of gender-based violence and stop protecting violent people. Survivors and families find the misogyny within institutions, on top of racism, especially concerning.



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ABBREVIATED ACTION: GAPS AND SOLUTIONS

REGION	IN-PERSON
Gap	Proposed Solutions from the Gathering
Accountability for funding.	Balanced reporting, tracking, and spending requirements—possibly differentiating between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations; reasonable reporting and tracking requirements; accessible criteria for 'small-scale' applicants; transparent decision-making regarding fund allocation; accountability to survivors, families, and communities for on-the-ground impact; access to government and organizational reports.
Safety for women.	Safe public transportation, especially within and between remote communities; more shelters/transportation to shelters; tiny homes for safe sleeping; women's safety program(s).
Marginalization of Indigenous women.	Free childcare (and related services) to allow for education and work; traditional lunch/food programs; reconsideration of laws that penalize grassroots movements led/supported by Indigenous women.
Racist policies.	Review of all policies impacting Indigenous Peoples; replace the Indian Act with Women's Councils.
Family voices at key tables.	Include survivors and families in oversight and government advocacy roles; non-political family Task Force with sufficient powers; robust survivor and family engagement.
Resources for searches.	Immediately accessible funds and resources for families, including infrared technology and search dogs; prioritization of missing cases over unsolved murders.
Traumatic courtroom experiences.	Justice system supports for survivors and families—legal advocacy for survivors, increased information for families (especially pre-trial).
Negative interactions with police.	Cultural and mental health competency training for police officers to create safety; consequences for body cams being turned off; Elder-accompanied wellness checks.
Poor police response.	Better resourcing and access to policing, especially for remote communities. Cultural competency training (see above).
Unknown last whereabouts of missing.	Unique 'ink' bracelets; GPS tracking jewelry; identification number 'call-in' system.
Unsolved missing connected with serial or other cases associated with bodies found in a landfill.	Excavation of landfills (specifically Brady Road Landfill in Winnipeg and consideration of others connected) as called for by survivors and families.
Unreturned loved ones/unidentified bodies.	Access to dentistry to create a database of dental records; identity bracelets.



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REGION	IN-PERSON
Gap	Proposed Solutions from the Gathering
Incomplete investigations into deaths.	Coroner and police accountability/added layer of justification for cause of death designations such as “exposure” or “misadventure”; family jurisdiction over loved one’s bodies.
Legal/justice system negligence.	Added penalty/consideration when pregnant women are harmed; no “good behaviour” sentence reductions for brutal crimes; sensitivity when returning a deceased loved one’s belongings; the creation of a First Nations-developed and -led justice system.
Children being removed from homes/ families being split up.	Safe housing; reconsideration of occupancy limits/housing to not exceed limits; a Jordon’s Principle worker in every community; dedicated intervention teams; removal of caregivers for support where necessary; supports for mothers, including Moon lodges.
Exploitation of Indigenous women by resource extraction workers.	Awareness and advocacy directed at company leadership; consequences for exploitation taking place in ‘man camps.’
Disenfranchised 60s scoop survivors.	Acceptance of 60s scoop survivors into First Nations; advocacy, and qualification for resources regardless of community membership.
Lack of knowledge of Indigenous Peoples among immigrants/newcomers.	Inclusion of education and citizenship test questions regarding Indigenous Peoples for immigrants to Canada.
Supports for men and boys.	Healing supports for all who have lost loved ones; speaking about men’s role in supporting MMIWG2S+ in a better way (walking together).
Gender inequity for 2Spirit women.	Ensure women are part of the 2Spirit conversation, specifically around gender-based violence, misogyny, and HIV/AIDS.
Wraparound supports for survivors and families.	More gatherings dedicated solely to healing (either nationally or regionally); healing camps, lodges, and/or treatment centres; recovery houses; circles for survivors and families left out of the MMIWG2S+ Inquiry; supports and advocacy based on case outcomes—including burial, ceremony, and other cultural protocol needs; eliminate competition for funding between families and organizations.
Re-traumatization of survivors and families.	Differentiated services, supports, or gatherings (for missing, murdered (solved or unsolved), survivors of violence, gender-diverse challenges).
Youth safety and healing.	Ceremony and gatherings specific to youth (especially those who have lost a loved one); therapy, support, and aftercare for youth; addressing racism in the school system; education for youth on human rights, misogyny, and health communication.
Misspent funds.	Communities to determine needs and culturally appropriate solutions.
Lateral violence and toxicity in communities and organizations.	Education, awareness, and advocacy around traditional ways and cultural teachings; accountability for organizations to be safe/not supporting misogyny.
Disparities for grassroots organizations.	Funding for overhead costs such as non-profit designations and liability insurance.



Connecting hearts and making change

Building on Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice: an Action Plan to end Violence against First Nations Women, Girls, and 2slgbtqjia+ People

REGION	IN-PERSON
Gap	Proposed Solutions from the Gathering
Exclusion of non-traditional survivors and families.	Space for survivors and families who follow Christian ways, or those of other religious denominations.
Lack of connection or information for survivors and families.	Regional 'hubs' tasked with maintaining inclusive lists of survivors and families and ensuring they are informed of resources and initiatives; more regional coordinators to support this work; more translation supports for traditional languages and French; immediate and indefinite on-the-ground supports directly to families of missing persons.
Cross-jurisdictional search efforts.	Elimination of arbitrary boundaries between First Nations communities and urban organizations (supporting First Nations women); coordinated efforts to support MMIWG2S+.
Incomplete or relayed conversations with government.	Focused conversations with all implicated government departments, rather than only Crown-Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC); involvement of high-up leadership (Ministers).

CONCLUSION

Survivors and families expressed concerns that the MMIWG2S+ Calls for Justice will end up shelved along with other government reports with no concrete action felt. This Gathering allowed survivors and families to introduce ways that the AFN can advocate to make changes in its sphere of influence. By keeping the Calls for Justice at the forefront of conversations, government can be held accountable for supporting an end to MMIWG2S+ across Canada.

As noted, this Report complements the AFN's evergreen action plan *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice* by providing additional insights, particularly regarding implementation and accountability. With each consultation or engagement, the AFN is working to achieve movement on this life and death matter. Survivors and families at the Gathering shared their stories and experiences and in doing so provided indispensable contributions to the next step of the AFN's work. In addition to reflective solutions, the AFN heard genuine grief and frustration with the lack of action felt by survivors and families. From this, a resounding recommendation for immediate action is being taken up.

The AFN intends and hopes that all survivors and families who spoke at the Gathering see their voices represented within this report and feel heard.