

# ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S LIVING CONDITIONS AS AFFECTED BY SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE





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The document is available in the « Parliamentary Proceedings » section of National Assembly Website : [assnat.qc.ca](http://assnat.qc.ca).

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Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec  
ISBN 978-2-550-81388-0 (Print)  
ISBN 978-2-550-81389-7 (PDF)

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND THE VICE-CHAIR

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Sometimes, our role as parliamentarians brings us to study issues that are more delicate than others. As Committee on Citizen Relations members, in spring 2015, we undertook this order after having heard community workers denouncing the difficult living conditions of Aboriginal women in Québec. This issue, which was relatively unknown at the time, has since been at the heart of political and media news.

According to Committee members, Aboriginals are in the best position to determine their needs and the appropriate solutions for their reality. Consequently, we want to pass their message on to the Government of Québec.

Our observations are based on accounts of persons who agreed to welcome us and whom we met at the Parliament and in Aboriginal environments. We were committed to carrying out this order with the full support of Aboriginal Peoples and in a manner respectful of their autonomy. Therefore, we decided to follow a pathbreaking collaborative approach within the parliamentary process.

We want to thank the Maison Missinak team for welcoming us to their shelter and to their healing site located in a natural environment. We are also grateful to the Inuit groups who facilitated the organization of meetings in Nunavik. An advisory committee of First Nations accompanied us to help us better understand Aboriginal realities. We want to thank the members of this committee for their sound advice. We especially want to underscore the great contribution and support of Mrs. Marjolaine Étienne and Mrs. Adrienne Jérôme, among others, during our visits to the communities. These visits allowed us to observe how Québec First Nations and Inuit are committed to developing their communities. Our goals could not have been reached without the collaboration and generous hospitality of the communities' members.

We carried out this order in a spirit of non-partisanship. Members of the Committee designated a small group to represent them in the Aboriginal communities. We wish to underscore the work and the commitment of the women Members who, besides the chair and the vice-chair, were part of the delegations, namely Mrs. Mireille Jean, Mrs. Lise Lavallée, Mrs. Manon Massé, Mrs. Carole Poirier, Mrs. Claire Samson and Mrs. Caroline Simard.

Moreover, we want to thank all the National Assembly's staff who assisted us during this order, namely the Library's Research Service analysts, Mrs. Mélissa Morin and Mrs. Magali Paquin, who prepared many briefing notes and summary reports, in addition to closely participating in the writing of this report. We want to highlight the efficient support of the successive clerks of the Committee since 2015, Mrs. Dany Hallé, Mrs. Anne-Marie Larochelle and Mrs. Stéphanie Pinault-Reid. They ensured the smooth running of the order and relations with the advisory committee, local stakeholders and Aboriginal communities.

Many speakers underscored the importance of forging new ties with Aboriginals. This self-initiated order on Aboriginal women's living conditions allows us to take concrete actions toward this goal. We hope that the Government of Québec will positively receive the observations and recommendations expressed in this report. Beyond the work achieved by the Committee on Citizen Relations, it is the Aboriginals' message that we are passing on to support them in combatting violence and, on a broader level, fulfilling their aspirations.

A stylized blue ink signature of Marc Picard, featuring a large 'M' and a star-like flourish.

Marc Picard  
Member for Chutes-de-la-Chaudière  
Committee Chair

A blue ink signature of Michel Matte, written in a cursive script.

Michel Matte  
Member for Portneuf  
Committee Vice-chair

# INTRODUCTION

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Members of Aboriginal nations have been victimized politically, socially, economically and culturally for decades. One consequence of this treatment is that their living conditions have profoundly deteriorated. First Nation and Inuit Peoples in Québec now face problems on multiple fronts.

Aboriginal women are particularly affected by the harm done to their people. On top of the collective and personal harm their nations have endured, Aboriginal women are victims of domestic, family and sexual violence. More and more Aboriginal communities are stepping forward to condemn these forms of violence and take concrete action to put a stop to them.

First Nation and Inuit communities are in the best position to identify the problems that affect them and find solutions to resolve them. Government agencies must support their efforts while respecting their autonomy and authority. The objective of the self-initiated order adopted by the Committee on Citizen Relations is to relay the solutions recommended by Aboriginal communities to end violence against women.

# THE ORDER

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On May 28, 2015, the Committee on Citizen Relations unanimously adopted a self-initiated order on Aboriginal women's living conditions as affected by sexual assault and domestic violence.<sup>1</sup>

The order stems from special consultations held in winter 2015 on the Government Action Plan Concerning Sexual Assault and hearings held as part of a forum on sexual assault (Forum itinérant en matière d'agression sexuelle). These events provided opportunities for members of the Committee on Citizen Relations to speak with Aboriginal community workers. They found the issues of violence and the living conditions of Aboriginal women particularly alarming.

According to statistics,<sup>2</sup> the rate of domestic violence against Aboriginal women is three times that of other Canadian women. In its 1996 report, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples found that the issue of family violence in communities is a threat to the safety of children and their ability to thrive.<sup>3</sup> Some 20 years later, the Québec Native Women organization still identified violence in the family setting as one of the main forms of violence to which Aboriginal women in Québec are subjected.<sup>4</sup> Aboriginal women are also often victims of the most serious form of violence, especially sexual assault.

The members of the Committee on Citizen Relations invited Aboriginal community stakeholders to voice their concerns on the causes at hand and the means to resolve them. This report presents a summary of their work, observations and recommendations. It builds on the interim report tabled in the National Assembly on May 17, 2016.<sup>5</sup>

## OBJECTIVES OF THE ORDER

The self-initiated order adopted by the Committee on Citizen Relations addresses a complex issue. The current living conditions of Aboriginal women and the violence that affects them have deep historical and systemic roots. Numerous studies have documented the phenomenon and proposed courses of action. Most recommendations made to date have been aimed at the federal government, since the division of powers puts Aboriginal affairs largely under federal purview.

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<sup>1</sup> Although not indicated in the official name, the order also covers family violence.

<sup>2</sup> See Statistics Canada: *Aboriginal Statistics at a Glance: 2nd Edition*, 2015; Maire Sinha (ed.), *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends*, 2013; Shannon Brennan, *Violent victimization of Aboriginal women in the Canadian provinces*, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Gathering Strength: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Vol. 3, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Québec Native Women, *Nāniawig Māmawe Ninawind = Stand With Us. Missing & Murdered. Indigenous Women in Quebec*, Kahnawake, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Committee on Citizen Relations, *Self-initiated Order on Aboriginal Women's Living Conditions as Affected by Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence: Interim Report*, 2016. [Online] <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/crc/mandats/Mandat-32649/index.html>.

But Québec also has a role to play with respect to First Nations. Its responsibilities may be less obvious but are equally fundamental. With that in mind, the Committee decided that its primary objective was to identify ways in which the Government of Québec can work within its scope of authority to help Aboriginal communities improve the living conditions of women and fight domestic, family and sexual violence.

We would never presume to be in a position to determine the best ways to improve the living conditions of Aboriginal women—we believe that role is best left to Aboriginal Peoples. They are the ones who can best assess the needs of their communities and find appropriate ways to meet them.

In practical terms, it was important for us to offer Aboriginal Peoples and Aboriginal community workers an opportunity to:

- Talk about the living conditions of Aboriginal women and the domestic, family and sexual violence that affects them;
- Share best practices, positive experiences and promising initiatives;
- Identify potential solutions to improve the living conditions of Aboriginal women and advance the fight against domestic, family and sexual violence.

We were committed to carrying out our work in a manner respectful of the abilities and autonomy of First Nations and Inuit Peoples, so our approach was to simply listen to and relay their words and recommended solutions to the Government of Québec. Our efforts focused on fostering and promoting the initiatives and practices that Aboriginal communities believe have cultural relevance and potential.

Our role as parliamentarians puts us front and center in Québec's public institutions, with privileged access to various ministries and agencies. In some ways our role is to be a mediator in fostering the government's understanding of Aboriginal concerns. One aspect of this role is "translating" what Aboriginal Peoples say into "institutional speak." We hope we were able to stay true to their words through this process.<sup>6</sup>

## CONTEXT OF THE ORDER

This order was carried out within a very specific context and marked by two determining factors. First, Aboriginal representatives provided input through a novel approach to parliamentary proceedings. And second, the political and media landscape surrounding certain issues affecting Aboriginal Peoples, and women in particular, has changed since the order was adopted in spring 2015.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that this report was written in French and then translated into English. In the event of differences between the two versions, the French text prevails.

## INPUT FROM ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

We were committed to carrying out this order with the full support of Aboriginal Peoples and in a manner respectful of their autonomy. During the special consultations held in November 2015, speakers encouraged us to ramp up our efforts to work with Aboriginal communities.

First, the director of the Missinak Community House and her team invited us to visit their shelter and recovery center to learn more about traditional Aboriginal healing methods. Then the Kativik Regional Government and Saturviit Inuit Women's Association of Nunavik helped us arrange meetings in the northern villages of Kuujuaq and Inukjuak. Their invaluable input helped us better understand the realities of the north.

An advisory committee was formed based on the recommendations of First Nations members. Aboriginal representatives determined its composition, role, responsibilities and operation and informed the Committee accordingly.

The First Nations advisory committee (Comité de veille des Premières Nations) has been making recommendations to the Committee since spring 2016. It comprises the following individuals and groups:

- Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador
- Representative of the elected women of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador
- First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission
- Québec Native Women
- Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec
- Elder
- Experts (as needed)

The First Nations advisory committee provided meaningful information and insight to help us better understand Aboriginal realities. The advisory committee reached out to various Aboriginal nations to explain our order and build bridges to facilitate our visits to those communities. Advisory committee members kept their respective networks informed of the Committee's progress.

Such an advisory committee is a novel parliamentary approach that clearly enriched the Committee's work. We thank the members of the First Nations advisory committee for their invaluable input and cooperation and the two committee representatives for their work and commitment. Marjolaine Étienne, former vice-chief of the Innu community of Mashteuiatsh, was our contact point from spring 2016 to winter 2017, and Adrienne Jérôme, chief of the Anishnabe Nation of Lac-Simon, has been working with us since winter 2017. One of their roles has been to build and maintain ties between the Committee on Citizen Relations, the First Nations advisory committee and the various Aboriginal communities in Québec.

Finally, a heartfelt thank-you to the Inuit and First Nations communities that participated—from near and far—in the Committee’s efforts. We gained a much better understanding of Aboriginal realities by working with local representatives, tapping into the expertise of stakeholders and going to visit the communities directly.

## CURRENT POLITICAL AND MEDIA LANDSCAPE

A number of events have occurred since the Committee started its work that shine a political and media spotlight on the issue of Aboriginal women’s living conditions, including:

- On October 22, 2015, *Enquête* aired an investigative report alleging that Sûreté du Québec police officers had been abusing Aboriginal women in Val d’Or. Tensions were high in the wake of the revelations, especially in Aboriginal communities.
- On December 8, 2015, the federal government announced the launch of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. An interim report was submitted on November 1, 2017, and a final report is expected in November 2018 but may be delayed.
- On December 21, 2016, the Government of Québec formed the Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Québec. The Commission is expected to submit its final report by September 2019.
- Finally, on June 28, 2017, the Government of Québec presented its Government Action Plan for the Social and Cultural Development of the First Nations and Inuit 2017–2022, which outlines the measures the government plans to roll out over the next five years.

While these events did not interfere with our work, they did factor into our reflections and recommendations.

## WORK COMPLETED BY THE COMMITTEE

For this self-initiated order, we heard from ten individuals and groups in special consultations at the Parliament Building. We received two briefs and one research document. We read 25 reports and studies selected with the First Nations advisory committee and participated in a training session delivered by an expert on Aboriginal history and realities. We visited a women’s shelter in an urban area and their recovery center in a natural setting. Lastly, we visited four Aboriginal communities, where we talked with residents and local workers.



## SPECIAL CONSULTATIONS

The Committee on Citizen Relations held special consultations at the National Assembly on November 17 and 25, 2015, and January 18, 2016 (Appendix I).

As a first step, we spoke to specialists and representatives from Aboriginal groups and organizations who painted a general portrait of the living conditions of Inuit and First Nations women in Québec. They gave us insight into a variety of issues affecting women, including domestic, family and sexual violence, and presented initiatives and projects underway in their communities. Finally, they put forward potential solutions and action items to improve not only the plight of women, but of the communities as a whole.

Next we met with representatives of three government entities who told us about measures the Government of Québec has implemented in Aboriginal communities.

Since the federal government has jurisdiction over Aboriginal affairs, we invited representatives of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada to meet with us as well.<sup>7</sup> They declined our invitation but submitted a brief.

## DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION PROCESS

Stakeholders we met with pointed out that numerous studies have already been done on the living conditions of Aboriginal Peoples, including women. In their opinion, the recommendations put forward in those documents have largely gone unimplemented.

Working with the First Nations advisory committee, we selected 25 reports and studies to help us better understand the issues surrounding the Committee's order (Appendix II). The observations, conclusions and potential solutions presented in those documents added additional insight to our work.

Finally, we participated in a special training session delivered by anthropologist Pierre Lepage on the history and repercussions of the policies of colonization and assimilation in Canada and Québec.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Divided into two departments in August 2017: Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Lepage is the author of *Mythes et réalités sur les peuples autochtones*, Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, Direction de l'éducation et de la coopération, 2009, 88 p. [Online] <http://www.cdpdj.gc.ca/Publications/Mythes-Realites.pdf>.

## ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH

We made an effort to step away from the official and formal Parliament setting to meet with members of Aboriginal communities on their own turf. Many people we heard during the special consultations emphasized that the realities facing Aboriginal communities vary from one community to the next. They recommended we reach out to the communities directly, which is what we did. We visited organizations and communities that extended the invitation.<sup>9</sup>

In February 2016 a group of parliamentarians from the Committee visited the Missinak Community House, an Aboriginal women's shelter in the Québec City area. They also visited the recovery center the shelter operates in a rural setting.

In March 2016 the group traveled to the northern villages of Kuujuaq and Inukjuak in Nunavik to take part in meetings organized with the assistance of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, the Kativik Regional Government and the Saturviit organization.

The First Nations advisory committee also helped organize community meet-and-greets. A group of parliamentarians paid a visit to the Huron-Wendat in Wendake on March 29, 2017, and the Anishnabe in Lac-Simon on May 17, 2017.<sup>10</sup>

These visits proved to be invaluable to the Committee's work. We learned about the specific issues facing each community and their differing realities, visions and approaches.

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<sup>9</sup> The detailed list of individuals and groups we met with is in Appendix I.

<sup>10</sup> A visit with the Atikamekw in Manawan had to be cancelled due to a scheduling conflict.

# BUILDING NEW RELATIONS WITH THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF QUÉBEC

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The speakers we heard in parliamentary committee held that it was high time to build new relations with the Aboriginal Peoples of Québec. The potential courses of action that came out of those discussions are presented in the next section of this report.

First, it would be useful to explain the situation of Aboriginal Peoples in Québec. The relations the government maintains with each Aboriginal community are closely related to each community's individual status.

## PORTRAIT OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN QUÉBEC

There are 11 Aboriginal nations in Québec divided among 55 communities, including 41 First Nations communities and 14 Inuit villages. In 2015 Québec's Aboriginal population was 104,633—92,504 First Nations and 12,129 Inuit.<sup>11</sup>

Québec's Aboriginal population is distributed among the 11 nations as follows:

- Abenakis
  - Two communities (Odanak and Wolinak)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 2,780
- Algonquins
  - Nine communities (Hunter's Point, Kebaowek, Kitcisakik, Kitigan Zibi, Lac-Rapide, Lac-Simon, Pikogan, Timiskaming, Winneway)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 11,748
- Atikamekw
  - Three communities (Manawan, Obedjiwan, Wemotaci)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 7,608
- Crees
  - Nine communities (Chisasibi, Eastmain, Mistissini, Nemaska, Oujé-Bougoumou, Waskaganish, Waswanipi, Wemindji, Whapmagoostui)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 18,535

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<sup>11</sup> Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, *Statistiques des populations autochtones du Québec 2015*, [Online] <http://www.autochtones.gouv.qc.ca/nations/population.htm> (consulted on March 20, 2018).

- Huron-Wendat
  - One community (Wendake)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 4,001
- Innus (Montagnais)
  - Nine communities (Essipit, La Romaine, Mashteuiatsh, Matimekossh–Lac-John, Mingan, Nutashkuan, Pakuashipi, Pessamit, Uashat-Maliotenam)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 19,955
- Inuit
  - 14 northern villages (Akulivik, Aupaluk, Inukjuak, Ivujivik, Kangiqsualujjuaq, Kangiqsujaq, Kangirsuk, Kuujjuaq, Kuujuarapik, Puvirnituk, Quaqtaq, Salluit, Tasiujaq, Umiujaq)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 12,129
- Malecites
  - One community (Cacouna and Whitworth [Malécites de Viger])
  - Total population (non-residents): 1,171
- Mi'kmaq
  - Three communities (Gespeg, Gesgapegiag and Listuguj)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 6,226
- Mohawks
  - Three communities (Akwesasne, Kahnawake and Kanesatake)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 19,026
- Naskapis
  - One community (Kawawachikamach)
  - Total population (residents and non-residents): 1,321

According to the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, an estimated 71% of Québec's Aboriginal population lives in one of the 55 communities. However, many Aboriginals have left their territory and moved to regional urban centers or big cities like Montréal, so the percentage of Aboriginal Peoples living outside their communities is increasing. According to representatives of Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec, more than half of Québec's Aboriginal population now lives in urban centers.

## FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL POWERS

Under Section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, the Parliament of Canada has exclusive legislative authority over “Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians.” It is by virtue of that constitutional authority that Parliament adopted the *Indian Act* in 1876.

Despite federal authority, Québec also has responsibilities toward Aboriginal Peoples. Those responsibilities vary depending on the status of each of the 11 recognized nations. Some are considered treaty nations and others non-treaty nations.

### Treaty Nations

There are three treaty nations in Québec: the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi. In the 1970s these communities signed agreements with the federal and Québec governments conferring a special status on them.<sup>12</sup>

The Cree and Naskapi have not been subject to the *Indian Act* since 1984.<sup>13</sup> In exchange for giving up certain ancestral rights, these nations negotiated exclusive hunting, fishing and trapping rights, the right to participate in development projects on their territory and certain financial compensation, among other things. The Inuit were never subject to the *Indian Act*. They opted to be attached to Québec institutions rather than Canadian ones by signing the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* in 1975. Inuit administrative structures are set out in the *Act respecting northern villages and the Kativik Regional Government*, which was adopted by the National Assembly of Québec in 1978.

The agreements granted the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi increased responsibilities, specifically on issues related to health and social services and education. Under various treaties, the three nations receive transfer payments to develop their own services.<sup>14</sup>

### Non-treaty Nations

There are eight non-treaty nations in Québec: the Abenaki, Algonquin, Atikamekw, Huron-Wendat, Innu, Malecite, Mi'kmaq and Mohawk. Unlike the three treaty nations, these eight nations have not signed

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<sup>12</sup> The Cree and Inuit signed the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* in 1975, and the Naskapi signed the *Northeastern Quebec Agreement* in 1978. The Cree, Inuit and Naskapi also concluded other agreements with the Government of Québec in the 2000s.

<sup>13</sup> The federal Parliament's passage of the Cree-Naskapi (of Quebec) Act in 1984 made their self-government official by excluding them from the *Indian Act*.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, the Cree formed the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, and the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services delivers healthcare services to the Inuit. In the Naskapi community, services are provided in the local community service center (CLSC).

agreements conferring special status. They have been subject to the *Indian Act* since 1876, so the Canadian government provides funding for healthcare services in their territory.

Under the constitutional division of powers, the Government of Québec does not provide funding to non-treaty communities directly, but such communities can utilize the programs and services available to the Québec population as a whole.<sup>15</sup> Certain programs are designed specifically for Aboriginal communities, including the Aboriginal Initiatives Fund (AIF), which provides financial support to economic development projects in Aboriginal treaty and non-treaty communities.

In addition to this type of financial assistance, the Government of Québec can also support non-treaty communities by handling program management and coordination tasks.<sup>16</sup> It can fund Aboriginal groups and organizations such as Québec Native Women. Finally, it can support a range of services in outlying areas.

### Aboriginal Peoples and Québec's Public Services

The Government of Canada may have a certain responsibility toward Aboriginal Peoples residing outside their territory, but it is the Government of Québec that actually provides them with health and social services and resources.

First Nations and Inuit people have access to universal hospitalization and health insurance no matter where they live. They can take advantage of the services and resources available in the public health and social services system like any Quebecer. But access to these services is not always easy for Aboriginals, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed further on.

Aboriginal people generally prefer organizations they perceive as being culturally safe. The native friendship centers that have been established in virtually every major Canadian city play an important role in that regard.<sup>17</sup>

Most public resources used by Aboriginal Peoples are in regional urban hubs and Montréal. The main organizations that provide assistance on issues related to violence and that are used by Aboriginal women are shelters and assistance centers for victims of crime (CAVACs).<sup>18</sup> Some of these organizations offer services specifically for Aboriginal Peoples.

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, non-treaty communities are eligible for government grants to build and operate childcare centers, as well as for one-time funding for specific projects.

<sup>16</sup> This is primarily the role of Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones.

<sup>17</sup> There are native friendship centers in Chibougamau, Joliette, La Tuque, Maniwaki, Montréal, Québec City, Roberval, Saguenay, Senneterre, Sept-Îles, Trois-Rivières and Val-d'Or.

<sup>18</sup> Some CAVACs have branches in Aboriginal communities, e.g., in Nunavik and Wendake.

The role and responsibilities of the Government of Québec with respect to Aboriginals living outside their communities will only increase as more and more of them leave for urban centers. Access to public services and the support offered by frontline organizations presents a significant challenge for First Nations and Inuit communities. Women are particularly affected because many of them live in cities.

## UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

A number of individuals spoke about the spirit that should underpin the Québec government's actions with First Nations and Inuit communities. We drew on their comments to formulate principles that should guide government action on Aboriginal issues.

## RECOGNIZING THE CONSEQUENCES OF COLONISATION AND ASSIMILATION POLICIES

Many studies have documented the damage suffered by Aboriginal Peoples. Among these, the reports of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 and of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2015 established a clear correlation between the history of Aboriginal Peoples and their contemporary realities.

Aboriginal people are particularly affected by the systemic discrimination of the *Indian Act*, government guardianship, being put on reserves and shifting to a sedentary lifestyle, the devaluation of their culture and identity alienation, forced education and the abuse they underwent in residential schools. Assimilation policies have broken family and community inter-generational ties, causing a rupture in the transmission of traditional culture, parenting skills and social regulation mechanisms within the communities.

It is essential to recognize the repercussions of those policies on Aboriginal Peoples. According to many stakeholders, it is the essential starting point of any action aiming to improve the living conditions of First Nations and Inuit community members.

## WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Across the board, stakeholders insisted on the need to work in partnership with Aboriginal Peoples on any issue that affects them. Decisions and projects that will impact First Nations and Inuit communities must be executed with their agreement and cooperation from the start.



On the specific issue of violence against women, a number of frontline organizations are already active in Aboriginal communities. They have developed specialized expertise and insight into the realities specific to the environments in which they work. Other organizations focus on coordinating activities on the ground in Aboriginal communities and at the regional and provincial levels. All of these groups are potential partners in developing programs and services to meet the needs of Aboriginal women.

## RESPECT THE REALITIES SPECIFIC TO EACH COMMUNITY

Québec's Aboriginal nations and communities each have their own model of governance, organization and operation. They have unique cultures and practices.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of respecting each nation's individual autonomy. They recommended avoiding taking a single across-the-board approach and felt it would be counterproductive to implement universal or turnkey solutions in Aboriginal communities because they would not be based on specific needs and realities on the ground.

Generally speaking, the Government of Québec's relations with Aboriginal Peoples are “nation to nation”—an approach advocated by most of the individuals we heard. However, in certain areas, such as health and social services, it seems appropriate for government action to be aligned with the specific needs of various communities. Aboriginal nations are not homogenous and the government must listen to each individual community.

## RECOMMEND A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Although each nation and community faces its own realities, Aboriginal Peoples all share a common cultural foundation. In general, they attach great importance to how the factors affecting their living conditions intersect. This so-called holistic vision is based on the idea that people must find a balance between the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions of their lives.

Stakeholders argued that such an approach is essential in addressing and resolving Aboriginal issues. The living conditions of women and manifestations of violence cannot be considered in isolation from all the factors that contribute to them. Therefore an integrated approach must be adopted that takes into account all the problems experienced by Aboriginal women in order to better address them.

## RECOGNIZE TRADITIONAL METHODS AND TOOLS

In general, stakeholders took issue with the fact that the programs and tools put in place by public institutions are not adapted to First Nations and Inuit culture and traditions. Many Aboriginal people are forced to comply with rules and norms that conflict with their values, beliefs, or lifestyles. Examples most often mentioned include inadequate support and healing resources and the administration of justice.

The people we met with were unanimous: It is essential that government entities recognize, respect and encourage the development of the cultural and traditional approaches and tools used by First Nations and Inuit. This support must not be limited to arts and culture, but incorporate the various models of action advocated by Aboriginal people, particularly in the areas of social and legal services. Recognition of traditional practices must include, among other things, preventive activities, healing processes and conflict resolution tools.

# COMMITTEE OBSERVATIONS

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During the order, we heard a great deal of testimony and information about the living conditions of Aboriginal women and the forms of violence they experience. We talked to several speakers from different backgrounds and listened to their comments and suggestions.

The Committee's findings are presented below. They present the main issues and problems identified by the people we met with and the solutions they recommend to remedy them.

We tried to work within the holistic approach recommended by Aboriginal communities as much as possible. To make it easier to understand and follow up on our findings, we grouped the main themes addressed by the people we spoke to into three categories.

The first category deals with the specific realities related to the Aboriginal context. It includes:

- The legacy of colonization and assimilation policies
- Coordination of Canadian and Québec programs and services

The second addresses factors that increase the risk of violence, including:

- The housing shortage
- Poor socioeconomic conditions
- Consumption and addiction

Finally, the third category covers interventions relating to violence. It includes:

- Violence prevention
- Detecting and reporting violence
- Intervention and support for victims of violence
- The healing process
- The justice system and youth protection
- Education and research

## 1. SPECIFIC REALITIES OF THE ABORIGINAL CONTEXT

All the persons met with pointed out that violence within Aboriginal communities is a legacy of the colonization and assimilation policies. In addition to being affected by the past, Aboriginal Peoples today face contemporary forms of colonialism, racism and discrimination.

Furthermore, the special status of Aboriginal Peoples complicates the deployment of resources, especially concerning the fight against domestic, family and sexual violence. Most of the communities

have to juggle with the governments of Canada and Québec, which leads to concrete problems on the ground.

Stakeholders' comments on the specific realities of the Aboriginal context focus on two aspects, namely:

- The legacy of colonization and assimilation policies
- Coordination between Canada's and Québec's programs and services

## 1.1 THE LEGACY OF COLONIZATION AND ASSIMILATION POLICIES

Since 1876, the Indian Act as well as provincial and federal policies have kept Aboriginal communities under government guardianship<sup>19</sup>. The Act institutionalized different forms of discrimination against women, in addition to excluding them from positions of power.

Simultaneously, living conditions of the Aboriginal Peoples have deteriorated. Many social problems affect the communities. These difficulties are sometimes portrayed in the media and to the population, mistakenly, as an inherent characteristic of the Aboriginal culture. As a vicious cycle, risk factors associated to Aboriginal Peoples fuel prejudices and racism against them.

In light of the testimonies we have heard, we insist on the following approach:

- Fighting racism against Aboriginals

### Fighting Racism against Aboriginals

The persons met with observed that racism affects every aspect of Aboriginal Peoples' lives. It may take the form of discrimination in employment, differential treatment from the staff of public utilities or private corporations, or insults or offensive gestures directed at them. These repeated setbacks impede progress on improving their living conditions in addition to undermining the confidence and self-esteem of those who suffer from it.

Representatives from the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec consider that we need to increase mediation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in order to overcome prejudices and racism. The former president of Quebec Native Women Inc., Ms. Michèle Rouleau, shares this opinion and considers it essential to invest in public education and awareness-raising measures with the aim of promoting healthy relations between the different groups within Québec's population. The

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<sup>19</sup> Note that the Indian Act does not apply to Inuit. Since 1984, it no longer applies to Crees and Naskapis.

Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones told us they support outreach activities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. For instance, the Harmonie Inter-Communauté project invites youth from the Listuguj Mi'kmaw Community and the Pointe-à-la-Croix municipality to mix together during sport, cultural and educational activities. We encourage the government of Québec, through its various programs, to increase this kind of initiative.

Knowing that lack of knowledge is liable to support prejudices, we believe in focussing on education to counter them. In this regard, we ask the government to review elementary and high school education programs so as to explain and value Aboriginal history and culture among youth. This approach would contribute to fighting prejudices and discrimination at their root, while valuing links between different populations living in Québec.

## 1.2 COORDINATION OF CANADIAN AND QUÉBEC PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

As explained earlier, each Aboriginal nation has its own model for administration and funding. In health and social services, treaty and non-treaty nations negotiate separate terms and conditions with the federal and provincial governments.

A number of people we met with felt that standardizing responsibilities and services between the two levels of government can be a complex process. This hinders the optimal deployment of resources and interventions to fight domestic, family and sexual violence.

Speakers' comments centered on these two ideas:

- Making sure the Canadian and Québec governments fulfill their obligations
- Improving coordination between the two levels of government

### **Making Sure the Canadian and Québec Governments Fulfill their Obligations**

Aboriginal representatives said that one of the most critical obligations governments have toward Aboriginal communities is paying what they owe under various agreements. These monies permit communities to fund their own services based on their priorities. However, some felt that Aboriginal communities do not receive their fair share of the federal and provincial budgets for health and social services.

Representatives of the First Nations of Québec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission held that the federal government's transfer payment system has not kept pace with the demographic growth of non-treaty communities. Likewise, members of the Inukjuak city council pointed out that the

Inuit, a treaty nation, pay taxes and duties just like other Quebecers. Therefore they expect to receive the same level of service from the Government of Québec as the population of other regions.

### Improving Coordination between the Two Levels of Government

According to stakeholders, many complications could be prevented if the governments of Canada and Québec improved coordination on their respective programs. In some cases, both levels of government dodge responsibility, resulting in unnecessary delays in followup and project implementation. Non-treaty nations are particularly affected by jurisdictional disputes.

Wendake social workers found that following up on certain domestic violence cases can be particularly complex. Intervention with mixed-race couples—where one partner is Aboriginal and one is not—can be difficult because the partners do not have access to the same resources.<sup>20</sup> One partner has to seek out local, federally funded social services and the other has to use Québec's public services. It becomes virtually impossible to pursue a shared approach to intervention and healing in such cases. This also applies to cases where one of the spouses leaves the Aboriginal territory, because that partner no longer has access to the same services as the partner who stayed in the community.

The people we heard explained that Aboriginal people who join another nation face critical challenges in terms of health and social services resources. Under Health Canada funding rules, they lose access to the services offered in their native community but are not eligible for the services offered in their new community. Some communities, Wendake among them, welcome dozens of Aboriginal outsiders to their territory—individuals who are very often victims of violence—but cannot give them the help and support they need.<sup>21</sup>

These constraints make it more difficult for Aboriginal women to escape violence, and they maintain a status quo that often naturally devolves into even more dangerous situations. To address this, Wendake stakeholders recommended that federal health funding allocations be based on the population residing in the community, not the number of registered Indians. That way all Aboriginal people living in the community can receive the same services, no matter where they come from.

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<sup>20</sup> Mixed-race couples are more common in communities near urban centers, like Wendake. Aboriginal couples from two different nations face a similar problem.

<sup>21</sup> Wendake is home to some 500 Aboriginal people from other nations, many of whom are in need, but cannot provide them with health and social services assistance.

## 2. KEY FACTORS THAT INCREASE THE RISK OF VIOLENCE

The issues presented in this section are by no means exclusive to Aboriginal Peoples—they are issues that can affect anyone. However, these factors are seen by experts and community members as major obstacles in addressing issues related to domestic, family and sexual violence faced by Aboriginal women, and as such are likely to increase the magnitude, frequency and severity of such violence.

The people the Committee heard regularly mentioned the following factors and the negative impact they have on the living conditions of Aboriginal women:

- The housing shortage
- Poor socioeconomic conditions
- Consumption and addiction

### 2.1 THE HOUSING SHORTAGE

Lack of housing is a critical issue in Aboriginal communities. Overcrowding and dilapidation are rampant. The situation, which is already dire, is likely to get worse in coming years due to strong population growth in these communities. The Inuit we met with identified the housing shortage as one of the most serious problems facing Nunavik. Many stakeholders felt that finding a solution to the housing crisis would have a positive impact on myriad other social issues, including domestic, family and sexual violence.

Two courses of action emerged from their testimonies:

- Boosting the housing supply in Aboriginal communities
- Supporting home renovation and improving community safety

#### **Boosting the Housing Supply in Aboriginal Communities**

The housing shortage poses a number of challenges for Aboriginal women and their families. First, the lack of housing leads to overcrowding. It is not uncommon to find more than a dozen people living in a two-bedroom apartment. Workers from the Tungasuvvik Shelter in Kuujuaq told us that overall quality of life is threatened. Overcrowding exacerbates the risk of domestic and sexual violence and increases the number of potential victims, including children. Furthermore, a lack of available housing in the community makes it difficult for women to leave the home, especially with their children. Without access to adequate housing, victims must live with their abusers. They sometimes find that leaving the community is the only way to escape.



In light of the far-reaching repercussions the housing shortage has on all aspects of Aboriginal living conditions, we ask that the Government of Québec prioritize this issue.

The main solution identified by stakeholders is to boost the housing supply in Aboriginal communities. In Nunavik, the housing crisis is getting worse despite the ongoing efforts of the Kativik Regional Government and Makivik Corporation. Representatives of the Kuujuaq city council noted that the housing shortage is further compounded by an overpriced and inadequate housing supply. They hope to provide more affordable social housing that can accommodate different family structures. They would like to review the agreement with Société d'habitation du Québec to better tailor the housing supply to Nunavik realities.

In non-treaty communities, housing construction and renovation are under federal purview. Obviously Aboriginal communities are the ones most affected by this type of work, so they should be active partners every step of the way—from planning to execution.

At the same time, Aboriginal people living in urban areas should not be overlooked. Representatives of native friendship centers in Québec indicated that many families are discriminated against when looking for an apartment in the city. They recommend building social housing that meets the unique needs of Aboriginal Peoples. In their view, this would encourage the rollout of much-needed services and help combat the feeling of isolation they experience.

On a broader scale, we ask that the Government of Québec support initiatives aimed at improving Aboriginal People's access to home ownership. We also call on the government to actively work to find solutions that meet the diverse residential needs of Aboriginal community members.

### Supporting Home Renovation and Improving Community Safety

The vast majority of houses built in Aboriginal communities are now dilapidated, posing serious health and safety problems. Broken windows and defective locks encourage break-ins. Regular and prolonged power outages and poorly lit streets, yards and homes create an environment conducive to night-time attacks. A document that was drafted with input from 141 women in Lac-Simon states that, “when night falls, fear sets in.”<sup>22</sup>

Dilapidated buildings need to be renovated for personal and family comfort and safety, and for reasons of public health. In addition, the safety of women at all times—day and night—should be taken into consideration in community planning and facilities. For instance, the women of Lac-Simon want better

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<sup>22</sup> Élisabeth Papatie and Patricia Larivière, *Compilation de données sur les conditions de vie des femmes autochtones qui subissent de la violence et des agressions sexuelles*, Centre de santé Lac Simon, 2017, p. 3. [Document submitted to Committee members during the Committee's visit to the Lac-Simon community on May 17, 2017.]

lighting at night, especially since strange prowlers roam the streets after dark. We ask that the Government of Québec help improve the safety and well-being of women through its home renovation and urban planning initiatives.

## 2.2 POOR SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

A number of people drew parallels between manifestations of violence against women and the poor socioeconomic conditions Aboriginal communities face. These communities report particularly high poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and school dropout rates.

Poor socioeconomic conditions exacerbate high-risk situations. During our meeting in Kuujuaq in March 2016, city council members spoke about a rash of suicides that rocked the community in the weeks leading up to our visit. Six young people took their own lives within a three-month span—an alarming number given that the local population is only about 1,800. The difficult conditions faced by communities everywhere are a source of individual and social tension that sometimes culminates in violence, most often against women.

Stakeholders felt the socioeconomic context in which Aboriginal women live has a huge impact on their living conditions. For one, they are the ones that suffer the repercussions of social ills. But also—in that Aboriginal women are seen as the pillars of their community—improving their living conditions seems necessary to enhance the lives of all community members (including men and children). So improving the lot of women must become a key priority in the socioeconomic development of communities.

Speakers' comments on this topic centered around three ideas:

- Supporting women's economic empowerment
- Keeping kids from dropping out of school
- Supporting Aboriginal women's rise to power

### Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment

Stakeholders put forward economic empowerment as a means to improve the living conditions of Aboriginal women. The Working Group of Elected Women of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador maintained that economically empowered women are better able to break the cycle of poverty and take part in the political, economic and cultural spheres.

In recent years, a number of Aboriginal communities have launched initiatives to spur economic development. Various businesses and services have emerged in tourism, forestry, transport and

information and communication technology. Several of these projects were made possible through the Aboriginal Initiatives Fund. Through our meetings, it became clear that a lack of ideas is not the problem and that Aboriginal know-how is flourishing. These initiatives invigorate communities and bring a great deal of pride to their members, among other positive spinoffs.

Projects related to the economic empowerment of women are also taking shape in Aboriginal communities. The Working Group of Elected Women of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador told us about one such initiative, the Business Women project led by the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Economic Development Commission. For this initiative, a task force examines the specific needs of Aboriginal woman entrepreneurs and the obstacles they face. It provides free services and support to women and communities to foster female entrepreneurship.

Support for Aboriginal initiatives is the form of government action most welcomed by the people we spoke with. Funding for networking activities allows Aboriginal people to create their own paths. For instance, a conference for elected women from First Nations held in April 2017 in Roberval was an opportunity for participants to learn about and discuss issues surrounding women's financial independence.

### Keeping Kids from Dropping Out of School

For women to become economically empowered, we must look at the conditions that make it possible. A number of stakeholders mentioned the issues of education and the dropout rate, which affect many Aboriginal youth, including girls.

The representatives of the Kativik Regional Government identified education as one of the major issues they face in Nunavik. With no institutions of higher education in the territory, Nunavimut students must head south to continue their studies. Representatives told us that many parents are reluctant to watch their children go because public schools remind them of the residential school experience. In addition, many young people abandon their studies because they are unable to adapt to their new life. The Kativik Regional Government and the Saturviit Inuit Women's Association would like an institution of higher education to be established in the territory to put young people on the road to success. Continuing education would no longer be synonymous with social, cultural and family uprooting.

Representatives told us that workplace training programs are generally well regarded. Some local initiatives are aimed specifically at women. For instance, the Tungasuvvik Women's Shelter in Kuujuaq works with the Youth Employment Services Nunavik to support young female dropouts. Childcare is a critical issue given the growing population and teen pregnancy rate. There is a daycare center adjacent to the Kitci Amik Adult Education Center in Lac-Simon to help mothers finish their education. Spots are reserved for parents who are in school.

The representative from the Makivik Corporation informed us that incarcerated Inuit cannot take advantage of training and work programs offered in jail because they do not speak French, the language used in the prison system. This makes it impossible for them to complete their education or provide for their families. The representative stressed the need for training for Inuit in Québec detention facilities. In her view, these programs should be offered in Inuktitut or English and be culturally sensitive.

### Supporting Aboriginal Women's Rise to Power

Some speakers held that improving the living conditions of Aboriginal women depends on their ability to hold positions of power. Their participation in decision-making bodies in nations and communities will help curb discrimination and sexism. In addition, women's concerns will be more carefully considered in community management.

As explained earlier, the *Indian Act* institutionalized forms of legal discrimination against women. They have long been excluded from positions of power. Today, more and more women are elected and hold decision-making positions in their communities. Yet they are still in the minority. Women who gain access to these positions may face barriers related to intimidation and sexism.

The people we met with argued that it is incumbent on Aboriginal women to develop their own tools and find the best ways to claim their rightful place in positions of power. Networking and sharing ideas and knowledge are essential in this. The conference for elected women from First Nations held in April 2017 touched on political leadership, among other topics. The UQAM Summer School: Female Indigenous Governance in Québec gave elected female officials and leaders an opportunity to hone their knowledge and skills.

## 2.3 CONSUMPTION AND ADDICTION

Most speakers linked manifestations of domestic, family and sexual violence to substance use and the forms of addiction associated with it—problems they find to be pervasive in Aboriginal communities.

The people we met have found that alcohol and drug abuse exacerbates episodes of violence. Victims face a higher risk of assault, which tends to be more serious when it occurs. Substance abuse and addiction also cause other problems. They can have a negative impact on mental health, for instance. Children who witness their parents' substance use are likely to repeat the pattern. Speakers mentioned that parents sometimes lose custody of their children as a result.

The communities we visited take issues related to substance abuse very seriously. They have their own ways of implementing solutions specific to their situation.

The people we met with would like to see more support for Aboriginal initiatives to stop addiction.

### Supporting Aboriginal Initiatives to Stop Addiction

Some communities try to limit the availability of harmful products. In Nunavik, for example, some villages have banned alcohol completely while others are testing different measures to limit sales. Lac-Simon is trying to keep drugs from being sold on the territory by adopting regulations allowing drug dealers to be evicted from the community.

In Nunavik, representatives from Sapumijit, the Crime Victims Assistance Centre (CAVAC), told us about the Saqijuq project, which provides support in cases of alcohol and drug abuse while helping rebuild traditional forms of social regulation. A number of local partners are involved in the project, as is the Government of Québec. It proposes an alternative justice and rehabilitation model for individuals who have committed alcohol-related crimes. The project is being tested in Puvirnituq, and initial results look promising. When we visited Nunavik in March 2016, there was no funding to roll the project out in other communities.

Various prevention programs and tools have been implemented in other communities. For instance, the Tulattavik Health Centre in Ungava encourages women to avoid drinking alcohol while pregnant. The Marie-Paule-Sioui-Vincent Health Centre in Wendake handed out glasses with an awareness message and a hotline number to men in the community.

More than anything, the government's efforts to address addiction must be rooted in the communities themselves. The approaches favoured by Aboriginal people differ from those used in the Québec public system because they often combine prevention and healing from a holistic perspective.

## 3. VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

The people we met spoke to us about specific issues surrounding domestic, family and sexual violence as it impacts Aboriginal women. They told us about initiatives, resources and services that have been developed to prevent assault and help victims. They also explained the needs of communities and their members and pointed out areas where such needs are not being met.

Generally speaking, the individuals we met feel there is not enough funding for initiatives aimed at combatting violence against Aboriginal women. This shortfall leads to a lack of resources not only in and

around Aboriginal communities, but also in urban areas. And, when they are available, services are often not suited to the culture and needs of Aboriginal Peoples, which presents a huge obstacle for victims.

The following sections address the issue of violence from a number of angles:

- Violence prevention
- Detecting and reporting violence
- Intervention and support for victims of violence
- The healing process
- The justice system and youth protection
- Education and research

### 3.1 VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Speakers told us that many Aboriginal people feel unsafe where they live. Recurring violence against women leads to trivialization and even normalization of the issue. Moreover, stakeholders and community members explained that domestic, family and sexual violence are particularly delicate issues that can be difficult, or even taboo, topics in some Aboriginal communities.

A number of speakers stressed the importance of raising awareness within Aboriginal communities about the forms and impacts of violence against women. This approach focuses on a long-term change in perceptions and behaviours and should be rolled out over an extended period of time. Speakers called for a firm, ongoing commitment from everyone involved in this issue, both within and outside the communities.

Prevention of violence is also a key concern for organizations in urban areas. They favour a cultural security approach to create a culture of prevention in their environment.

The people we spoke to think support for Aboriginal prevention initiatives is paramount.

#### Supporting Aboriginal Prevention Initiatives

Across the board, the people we spoke to felt that the tools and resources used in the Québec system are not adapted to Aboriginal realities. They suggested that Aboriginal communities organize violence prevention awareness campaigns and initiatives.

The solutions proposed vary by community. Some focus on traditional activities such as collective kitchens and crafts, creating contexts in which community members can share experiences and advice.

Lac-Simon developed a violence prevention training program for different family members. Once trained, they take the knowledge home and share it with their loved ones. Other communities opt to join forces with local partners—e.g., schools, youth centres or job centres—to develop awareness campaigns.

Women from Inukjuak reiterated the importance of prevention and intervention with young children. They applauded the Good Touch Bad Touch program, which is aimed at preventing youth sexual assault. An initiative of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, the program is offered in all northern villages. However, we were told that teachers are not equipped to address these issues in the classroom and support children who are being subjected to violence. People pointed out that more tools and resources are needed to appropriately train adults in violence prevention.

The women of Lac-Simon would also like to support teens more effectively. They see gaps in the sex education teens receive. Workshops to raise awareness of violence in relationships are periodically offered to young people. The organization Québec Native Women advocates the development of a sex education and assault prevention program that would also look at the origin of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities from the historical, political and social perspective. The Saturviit representatives explained that most Aboriginal youth are not aware of the trauma suffered by their elders, so they do not understand the causes of their parents' behaviour.

Québec Native Women also argues that boys and young men should be actively involved in prevention initiatives. The organization feels they must take ownership and help find solutions that implicate them in the process. In fact, many Aboriginal people feel that male empowerment and engagement in the process of violence prevention and intervention is necessary for things to change.

Other initiatives focus on healthy family relationships. For instance, the Makivik Corporation offers a program in detention centres aimed at men and women individually as well as couples. The Tungasuvvik women's shelter in Kuujuaq organizes activities to promote healthy family relationships and help mothers with relationship and substance use problems. The annual Children's Day in Lac-Simon is an opportunity to discuss family values and make parents aware of the repercussions of violence in the family setting.

One thing became clear from these discussions: current initiatives are not enough. Aboriginal communities and organizations in urban areas lack the resources to raise awareness and prevent domestic, family and sexual violence. Women from Wendake pointed out that these projects take time. In their view, employee retention and stable, steady funding set these initiatives up for success.

The Government of Québec must demonstrate its commitment to preventing violence toward Aboriginal women and girls by supporting local projects, targeted awareness campaigns and the development of prevention tools. In all cases, we emphasize the need to support initiatives led by Aboriginal organizations and communities so they can decide on the measures best suited to their needs and realities.



## 3.2 DETECTING AND REPORTING VIOLENCE

A number of individuals noted that it can be very difficult for Aboriginal women to come forward to report an assault. Violence within a community, particularly within a couple or family, is further complicated by the small size of Aboriginal enclaves and how close their members are.

We were told that victims often decide to keep quiet for fear their story will get out and they will be the target of judgment or reprisal. The fact that the family is a cornerstone of Aboriginal culture makes reporting violence all the more difficult. In some cases, victims are forced to remain silent in order to preserve family unity. According to the women we spoke to, victims are even more reluctant to disclose an assault if their attacker is a person of influence in the community. The Working Group of Elected Women of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador insisted that victims should be supported even when they are unwilling to name their abuser.

Representatives of the Tungasuvvik shelter pointed out that Aboriginal women must draw on great courage, resourcefulness and self-confidence to leave an abusive relationship. Some women would rather leave the community than expose themselves to disapproval, which can make them even more vulnerable.

Two action items emerged from our discussions:

- Supporting Aboriginal initiatives aimed at breaking victims' silence and isolation
- Making sure victims understand their rights, the reporting process and what happens next

### Supporting Aboriginal Initiatives Aimed at Breaking Victims' Silence and Isolation

Identifying and reporting abuse is part of the violence prevention process, and we believe Aboriginal people are best able to determine how to recognize victims and help them break the silence.

In some cases, entire communities are coming together to address the problem. In Lac-Simon, for instance, a big march was organized to denounce all forms of violence on the territory, including violence against women. In Wendake, stakeholders from the Marie-Paule-Sioui-Vincent Health Centre noticed an increase in psychological violence in romantic and family relationships, so they implemented an assault identification and prevention program for adults and seniors. They also developed a comprehensive guide to best practices in domestic and family violence drawing on knowledge and tools gained over the years. It has since become a reference for community practitioners.

Some women felt that confidentiality is a big problem when it comes to reporting violence in small communities. The women we spoke to in Lac-Simon said confidentiality concerns are a barrier to the

disclosure of violence.<sup>23</sup> In many cases, the people who have to intervene know both the victim and perpetrator personally, so they must have the resources and tools needed to act discreetly and maintain confidentiality.

Some Aboriginal women, like those who live in remote areas, are especially isolated. In those communities, including Nunavik, women's shelters and family homes are critical resources for victims. The people we met with in Nunavik also called for more funding for these services. Social media is another way to facilitate communication among women. Finally, Saturviit representatives recommended phone support as a way to help break victims' isolation.

### Making Sure Victims Understand their Rights, the Reporting Process and what Happens Next

People told us that, in general, Aboriginal people know little about the domestic, family and sexual violence intervention and follow-up process, especially within the Québec system. Women do not always understand divorce procedures, the role of Directors of Youth Protection and what happens after violence is reported. Because of this lack of information—especially in Aboriginal languages—false and contradictory information gets circulated within communities.

According to representatives from the Tungasuvvik shelter, these gaps present an obstacle for women looking to escape violent relationships. Better dissemination of information on reporting procedures and the legal process in situations of violence would make it easier for victims to come forward. The information should be translated into the various Aboriginal languages, and since oral language plays a key role in Aboriginal culture, it could also be recorded in audio or video format.

## 3.3 INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Unlike in Québec's health and social services system, where the tools used for intervention are relatively uniform, anti-violence programs in First Nations and Inuit communities are not standardized. As a reminder, each community is autonomous in terms of how it is governed. The people we spoke to stressed that this independence must be preserved so that each community can develop services and resources to meet its specific needs.

That said, there are commonalities among Aboriginal communities. The police are usually the first to respond in violent situations. Then health and social services workers step in to provide ongoing support to victims.

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<sup>23</sup> Élisabeth Papatie and Patricia Larivière, *op. cit.*

The people we met with criticized the lack of resources available to help Aboriginal women within their communities and in urban areas. Moreover, Aboriginal people that use services in the Québec system are confronted with intervention programs and tools that are not aligned with the unique aspects of their culture and values.

The following courses of action emerged from our discussions:

- Adapting police response
- Opening and supporting shelters
- Developing and maintaining resources for men
- Improving training and support for workers
- Supporting cooperation between Aboriginal and Québec services
- Getting information out about Québec system services
- Adapting Québec system services to Aboriginal realities

### Adapting Police Response

A number of people told us that the relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and non-Aboriginal police forces are very often strained—an issue that is not unique to any one community. The mass slaughter of over 1,000 sled dogs by police officers in Nunavik in the 1950s and 1960s caused resentment and defiance within the local population. More recently, the events in Val-d'Or heightened tensions between police and Aboriginal community members, especially women. Representatives from Lac-Simon told us that women in their community are reluctant to travel alone for fear of being questioned or harassed by non-Aboriginal police officers. During hearings, Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec pointed to the “over-prosecution” of Aboriginal people living in urban areas.

The people we spoke to also mentioned that Aboriginal women who are subjected to violence outside their community face significant obstacles. Some expressed their fear, helplessness and frustration at being ignored or not believed when reporting abuse or assault to the police. Many felt it can be pointless or even dangerous to report violence by non-Aboriginal individuals.

Most Aboriginal communities have their own police department. The people we heard maintained that Aboriginal people prefer to use Aboriginal services, so they would like to see more Aboriginal staff hired. According to some, Aboriginal police officers should be trained on how to deal with women who are victims of violence.

Generally speaking, the people we met felt that non-Aboriginal police officers lack insight and experience in Aboriginal realities. Speakers said they often show evidence of racism and prejudice, lack sufficient knowledge of Aboriginal culture and are ill-equipped to deal with community members, including women.

Members of the Inukjuak city council suggested partnering Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal police officers. The Québec Native Women organization felt that the recruitment and training of female police officers would build Aboriginal women's trust and facilitate intervention in cases of violence. By far, the solution put forward the most was to adequately train police officers on Aboriginal realities.

## Opening and Supporting Shelters

According to the people we met, victims of violence lack safe havens—a situation exacerbated by the housing shortage the vast majority of communities are facing. Shelters therefore play a critical role in welcoming and supporting women and their children.

Réseau des maisons d'hébergement autochtones du Québec operates 11 women's shelters across the province: three in urban areas (Québec City, Montréal and La Tuque), three in Inuit villages (Inukjuak, Salluit and Kuujuaq) and five in or near First Nations communities (Kitigan Zibi, Listuguj, Opitciwan, Schefferville and Sept-Îles). Some are funded by Indigenous Services Canada.<sup>24</sup>

These facilities are struggling to meet demand. Despite high volume, some shelters in Nunavik have had to close due to a lack of resources. The funding from the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services is not enough. Representatives from the Ajapirvik shelter in Inukjuak and the Tungasuvvik shelter in Kuujuaq called for more funding.

A number of women we spoke to felt that each community should have its own shelter. Otherwise abused women must continue living near their abuser. And women who leave often take their children with them. This drives a wedge between them and their community, making it difficult to keep their bearings.

In light of what we heard, we believe that all women who are victims of violence should have access to these services. The benefits would be many: Women could stay in their community but away from their abusers, and school-aged children who go with their mother could stay in the same school and still see their friends rather than being uprooted. Shelters in Aboriginal communities are safe havens for women; they are adapted to Aboriginal culture and needs and offer tailored prevention, support and healing resources.

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<sup>24</sup> Kitigan Zibi (Algonquins), La Tuque (near the three Atikamekw communities), Listuguj (Mi'kmaq), Opitciwan (Atikamekw), Schefferville (Innus de Matimekush–Lac-John) and Sept-Îles (Innus d'Uashat-Maliotenam). In February 2017 the federal government announced the construction of a new shelter in the Kawawachikamach community (Naskapis).

## Developing and Maintaining Resources for Men

To end situations of violence, many Aboriginal people advocated an inclusive approach involving mediation and reconciliation in which the victim, abuser and even family members all play a role. Accordingly, the people we spoke to felt resources need to be developed to help men get their violent behaviour under control.

Workers and community members felt there are not enough resources and services available to men and would like to see programs specifically designed with their needs in mind. Québec Native Women asked that more services be developed for sexual offenders with a desire to change. People also argued that men should have access to traditional healing resources as women do.

Family homes and more funding are other potential solutions. Family homes provide a safe place offering advice and guidance to individuals, couples and families. They focus on traditional assistance and support models.

## Improving Training and Support for Workers

The people we met raised a number of issues related to working conditions and employee support and training. The need for health and social services in Aboriginal communities is huge, which creates challenges for frontline workers.

The representatives from the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services informed us that workers in these communities are overloaded. They are reluctant to take sick leave even when they really need it because that is not the Inuit way. The same is true in most Aboriginal communities.

Overall, Inuit staff feel unequal to southern workers who benefit from better working conditions. According to Board representatives, this unequal treatment exacerbates racism. Members of the Kuujuaq city council felt much the same. They condemned the fact that there are two classes of workers, with Inuit Peoples having more challenging working conditions.

Recognizing the role of caregivers, elders and traditional healers is also an important issue. Members of the Kuujuaq city council felt these individuals are undervalued by non-Aboriginal employees and regularly excluded from professional teams. They show signs of exhaustion without their contributions being recognized.

Moreover, in most communities we met with, members have to deal with a higher rate of turnover of non-Aboriginal employees, which makes it difficult to build ties with local workers and provide long-term support. Social services are often delivered by young interns who not only lack experience but are also ill-equipped to deal with Aboriginal problems. The Lac-Simon representatives noted that these students are

content to simply apply what they have learned from their textbooks and that their interventions do not resonate with Aboriginal values and culture.

One of the solutions put forward to mitigate these problems was to hire new staff, Aboriginal employees in particular. Speakers also requested additional training for non-Aboriginal workers.

The people we met with in Nunavik would like Inuit staff to have the same working conditions as non-Aboriginal employees. They would also like people who practise traditional approaches to be recognized by professional health and social services teams.

In addition, Aboriginal frontline workers expressed a desire for more training in violence and sexual assault. The employees of the Ajapirvik shelter in Inukjuak would like to organize more support workshops and be better equipped to help women. To that end, Québec Native Women would like to see Réseau des maisons d'hébergement autochtones get the same basic funding as shelter groups within the Québec system. This financial assistance could be used to improve training and make it easier to share resources among communities. The organization also suggested organizing travelling talks on sexual assault in Aboriginal communities all over Québec. These tours would be an opportunity for people working with First Nations and Inuit Peoples to get together, exchange ideas and learn from each other. Aboriginal women suggested that these gatherings should be held in conjunction with the creation of permanent roundtables.

### **Supporting Cooperation between Aboriginal and Québec Services**

Many of the people we met felt that it was essential to develop partnerships within the public health and social services system to support the efforts of workers in Aboriginal communities. Québec Native Women representatives maintained that concerted efforts by all those working to combat violence must be encouraged. According to the organization, local or regional roundtables would foster better integration of services and continuity of care. The organization recommended that the groups include representatives from Aboriginal social services, youth centres, health centres, public safety services and education.

This recommendation addresses a concrete need. Social workers from Wendake told us they have good relationships with the Québec social services offered on the outskirts of the Huron-Wendat territory but that these ties remain informal and sporadic. The Marie-Paule-Sioui-Vincent Health Centre is still not recognized as a service unit in the Capitale-Nationale region, which prevents valuable expertise and information from being shared. Workers would like to see a regional roundtable formed to ensure ongoing collaboration with local services.

Québec Native Women recommended establishing memoranda of understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal shelters, police departments, social services, youth centres and other entities likely to

intervene in cases of domestic, family or sexual violence against Aboriginal women. These agreements should be developed on a local or regional basis, so as to respect the realities of the different communities.

A concrete example of cooperation is presented in the brief submitted by the former Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada agency. The mission of the Montréal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network is to facilitate cooperation among key stakeholders in the city. Specifically, the group developed a guide to raise awareness of Aboriginal culture within the City of Montréal police department.

In parliamentary consultations, the spokespersons for Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux stated that they were working with federal partners and various Aboriginal communities. The ministry's goal is to build bridges between institutions in the public system and services in Aboriginal communities. For its part, the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones plans to support roundtables in certain regions. The goal of these events will be to optimize the quality and accessibility of health, social and legal services.

We encourage the government to continue its efforts in this regard. Service access and continuity are essential, no matter where Aboriginal Peoples are living.

### Getting Information Out about Québec System Services

According to some, First Nations and Inuit Peoples do not know very much about the services and programs available to them in Québec's health and social services system.

Generally speaking, we believe that better dissemination of information about existing resources can help Aboriginal people and those working in their communities. While carrying out this order, we noted that it is very difficult to find up-to-date information on the Québec government resources available to Aboriginal people within and outside their communities. This also applies to calls for projects that provide ad hoc funding to organizations and communities. The Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, which coordinates various programs and services available to Aboriginal Peoples, does not regularly update its website. Portail Québec does not have a specific section for Aboriginal Peoples like it does for young people, seniors and people with disabilities.<sup>25</sup> We believe the government should regularly update the information on its websites and make it easier to find. We encourage the government to consult with Aboriginal partners so that solutions envisaged for disseminating information are based on the concrete needs of these communities.

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<sup>25</sup> Portail Québec. [Online] [www.citoyens.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.citoyens.gouv.qc.ca).

## Adapting Québec System Services to Aboriginal Realities

Workers told us that many Aboriginal people are reluctant to use the services offered in Québec's system because, in general, they are not aligned with Aboriginal realities or needs and do not offer a sufficiently safe environment from a cultural and social perspective.

Aboriginal women are more likely to use certain resources in the Québec system in situations of violence. For instance, many turn to shelters in the Québec system because of the lack of similar facilities in their community. In the view of the people we met, shelters need to take the needs of First Nations and Inuit Peoples into greater account, specifically by recognizing traditional healing methods as a tool for intervention.

Workers also pointed out that employees working in the Québec system are not familiar with First Nations and Inuit culture and values. Many Aboriginal people do not feel welcomed or respected when they use Québec services, where they encounter discrimination and racism. As a solution, the people we heard asked that staff in the Québec system be better trained in dealing with Aboriginal clients.

## 3.4 THE HEALING PROCESS

The differences between Aboriginal and Québec cultures are evident when it comes to care and healing. Because of these fundamental differences, the protocols of the Québec system do not meet the needs of First Nations and Inuit Peoples.

Case in point, in Aboriginal culture, acts of violence are seen as expressions of a deeper hurt, so the attacker must heal as well, not just the victim. This is one of the reasons the people we heard insist on engaging men in the process of ending violence against women. They have a role to play, with a view to healing and reconciliation. But the Québec justice system is structured more around the idea that abusers must be punished for their actions, which is the opposite of the Aboriginal approach.

The workers we met called for healing resources for all First Nations and Inuit Peoples. The Aboriginal healing process may include women, men and children, with participation by victims, attackers and family members. Determining the best approach is a personal decision.

Finally, the Aboriginal healing process differs in its use of traditional tools. It is based on spiritual ceremonies, the guidance of elders, healing forests and sharing circles. The people we met explained how intense and demanding the process is for those who undertake it.



The courses of action they advocate for healing are:

- Supporting the creation and operation of healing centers
- Recognizing the value of Aboriginal healing methods

### Supporting the Creation and Operation of Healing Centres

The creation of healing centres and healing lodges was one of the recommendations in the 1996 report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, yet over 20 years have passed and little has changed. According to speakers, resources still fall well short of being able to meet demand.

For one thing, people pointed out that trips into the forest are expensive. Permanent healing lodges like the Missinak house lack funding. There are also not enough models and knowledgeable people to provide guidance. That role is often played by elder women who are at risk of exhaustion because of the sustained efforts healing requires. An elder woman from Lac-Simon pointed out the importance of supporting caregivers by giving them time off.

A number of people expressed an interest in healing circles to allow people to express and share suffering while encouraging intergenerational activities and opportunities for exchange. Members of the Inukjuak city council argued that healing circles should benefit all community members.

In light of what we heard, we believe it is important that the government support these types of initiatives. This approach fits within the First Nations and Inuit cultural framework. It aims not only to help victims, but also to prevent recidivism of violence.

### Recognizing the Value of Aboriginal Healing Methods

Recognizing traditional forms of Aboriginal healing is not simply a matter of supporting and funding resources. Workers argued that Québec government structures must fully recognize the value of these approaches. A woman from Lac-Simon pointed out that Directors of Youth Protection do not recognize the healing process as they do therapy or a return to the classroom. And yet, starting the healing process is a much more constructive approach for many Aboriginal people.

In our observation, people do not understand how meaningful and far-reaching this process is. So we are asking the government to recognize the value of traditional support and healing tools and to ensure that government agencies recognize the legitimacy of Aboriginal healing processes in their protocols.

### 3.5 THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND YOUTH PROTECTION

Aboriginal families experiencing family violence are likely to have to go through the Québec justice system. Challenges surrounding the administration of justice in an Aboriginal context abound. The issue was well documented in a special report on Nunavik by the Québec Ombudsman tabled in February 2016,<sup>26</sup> a report which resonated with the people the Committee spoke to.

Many Aboriginal people said that Québec's justice system is foreign to their culture and not suited to resolve conflicts within the community. Specifically, they felt incarceration was not an effective way to deter violence and criminality in Aboriginal communities. Monitoring and supervising offenders is challenging due to a lack of resources. Some critics also argued that the justice system is unfair and does not take into account the trauma experienced by First Nations and Inuit Peoples in the past.

Recommendations to mitigate these problems centred on four ideas:

- Supporting community restorative justice programs
- Improving judicial services in Aboriginal languages
- Reducing delays in the judicial process
- Making the Québec judicial community and Directors of Youth Protection aware of Aboriginal realities

#### Supporting Community Restorative Justice Programs

People we met in Nunavik emphasized the need to adapt the justice system to Aboriginal cultural frameworks, specifically through community restorative justice programs. They want Inuit people to be responsible for their own administration of justice, working alongside government.

Community restorative justice programs have much in common with traditional Aboriginal approaches to conflict resolution and better reflect Aboriginal values and culture. They engage elders and emphasize healing over punishment. Through justice committees, communities support offenders and guide victims through a holistic healing process.

Ten communities in Nunavik have formed justice committees with the assistance of the Makivik Corporation. A representative of the organization told us that these committees are an effective and economical way to handle cases of violence. This alternative justice program could be implemented in collaboration with the Itinerant Court and the Québec justice system. Justice committees have proven to

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<sup>26</sup> Québec Ombudsman, *Detention conditions, administration of justice and crime prevention in Nunavik: Special report by the Québec Ombudsman*, Québec City, 2016, [Online] <https://protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca/en/investigations-and-recommendations/special-reports/detention-conditions-Nunavik>.

be all too effective: they are struggling to meet demand. The Makivik Corporation lacks funds to hire more staff.

To help offenders reintegrate into the community, the Kativik Regional Government established culturally sensitive rehabilitation programs that are in line with Aboriginal values. There is one such program in Nunavik. Community reintegration workers are stationed in Kuujuaq, Inukjuak, Puvirnituk and Salluit and work with probation officers. They monitor offenders' compliance with the conditions of their probation. They refer them to support services, community resources and caregivers as needed to encourage them to resolve their conflicts and go back to a normal life.

### Improving Judicial Services in Aboriginal Languages

People we spoke to mentioned that many Aboriginal people do not understand how Québec's justice system works. The language barrier is a major obstacle to understanding the justice system's role, functioning and procedures. These people felt that it would help greatly if communication tools were available in Aboriginal languages.

Women from the Sapumijit organization, the Crime Victims Assistance Centre in Nunavik, argued that, at a minimum, translation services should be offered and Inuktitut interpreters should be onsite for the accused and for victims. Sapumijit's role is to provide guidance through the judicial process. The staff are Inuit. The assistance centre provides information on legal rights and remedies, refers victims to specialized resources and attends Itinerant Court hearings. However, translation is a common problem that bogs down the judicial process and employee workloads. Sapumijit staff usually communicate with centre users in Inuktitut. Then they have to translate that testimony (usually into English) for Québec's administration of justice. Then materials have to be translated into French for members of the Itinerant Court, who are usually French speakers. At the end of the proceedings, the ruling, which is written in French, must be translated back into English and then into Inuktitut. Sapumijit employees are not professional translators, which makes this multistep process all the more burdensome. They insisted that trained people should be hired and paid to do this work.

### Reducing Delays in the Judicial Process

A number of individuals we spoke to mentioned unreasonable delays in Québec's justice system. Delays have negative impacts, especially in small and very small communities—ones in remote areas in particular.

The situation is particularly worrisome in Nunavik, where an Itinerant Court comes to Inukjuak only five to six times a year. Victims may be subjected to harm while waiting for a ruling. They have to continue living near—or even with—their accused abusers. Frequent Itinerant Court delays and postponements also have an impact on the quality of testimony and evidence. According to the representatives of the Tungasuvvik women's shelter, this creates a lot of anxiety in victims and may be one reason for the low reporting rate.

Community restorative justice programs were one of the solutions proposed by the people we met because they would free up the justice system and speed up proceedings.

People we spoke to also suggested making adjustments to current procedures. Members of the Kativik Regional Police Force asked to have greater responsibility. They said that Sûreté du Québec police officers are the only ones permitted to shoot videos of victim statements but that it can take a while for them to come all the way to Nunavik. The Kativik Regional Police Force would like authorization to record videos as soon as they receive a complaint. This would keep victims from having to repeat their story, resulting in less confusion and fewer omissions. It could be done in Inuktitut, which would improve the accuracy of statements.

### **Making the Québec Judicial Community and Directors of Youth Protection Aware of Aboriginal Realities**

The people we met felt that the Québec judicial community (officials, lawyers, judges, etc.) do not understand the history and modern-day realities of Aboriginal Peoples. In their experience, the Québec justice system deals with Aboriginal cases the same way it does all other cases and does not take into account the specific context in which First Nations and Inuit Peoples live. In practice, this blanket approach exacerbates inequalities between different population groups. One suggestion we heard was to improve judicial staff training on Aboriginal history and realities.

People also told us that many Aboriginal parents have a complex or even contentious relationship with their regional Director of Youth Protection (DYP). The over-representation of Aboriginal children in foster care creates suspicion and frustration in communities. According to Lac-Simon workers, Aboriginal parents have had so many bad experiences with the DYP that many mothers choose to remain silent in situations of domestic violence for fear that their children will be taken away from them.

They said that the DYP's operating procedures, rules and standards are not consistent with Aboriginal culture and education. The removal of children from their family or community brings back memories of residential schools and is not part of First Nations and Inuit mores. The criteria for children's supervision imposed by the DYP are considered inadequate and even discriminatory toward Aboriginal Peoples. The

women from Lac-Simon criticized the DYP's lack of understanding of children's autonomy and what families eat, for instance. Lastly, they felt the DYP assesses parenting skills against a Québec model that is of little value in an Aboriginal context.

We ask that the government pay close attention to relations between DYPs and Aboriginal communities. Certainly, existing DYP procedures could be adjusted to alleviate some of the frustrations caused by their interventions.

### 3.6 EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Most people we met indicated that having more professional resources on the ground would improve services for First Nations and Inuit Peoples.

The solutions they recommended fall within the following three courses of action:

- Training Aboriginal professional resources
- Training non-Aboriginal professional resources
- Keeping knowledge current and pursuing continuing education

#### Training Aboriginal Professional Resources

Speakers felt that training First Nations and Inuit workers is a priority. Aboriginal people's sensitivity to their own culture, knowledge of one or more traditional languages and familiarity with mores and customs can facilitate interventions in preventing and combating violence against women. Training would also help keep workers in the community, especially in remote areas.

Women from Inukjuak called for more professionals, and specifically healthcare professionals, in Nunavik. In their view, something similar to the Midwives program operated by the Inuulitsivik Health Centre in Puvirnituq should be created for nursing and social work. The Midwives training program is recognized by Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and Ordre des sages-femmes du Québec. Student midwives receive on-the-job training under the supervision of senior midwives. The pace of the program is tailored to each student. The program is considered a success for the Inuit community. According to speakers, it should be used as a model for similar initiatives in other fields.

We believe that the Government of Québec should help develop training programs for Aboriginal Peoples in health and social services. Similarly, there should be more Aboriginal police officers—male and female. The recruitment and training of female police officers would facilitate interventions in domestic and family violence situations.

Speakers suggested a number of possible models: conducting pilot projects in communities based on the Inuit Midwives model, adapting existing training programs to Aboriginal realities or facilitating Aboriginal access to these areas of study.

### Training Non-Aboriginal Professional Resources

Several people recommended improving the cultural training and preparation of non-Aboriginal workers who interact with First Nations and Inuit Peoples so they will be better equipped to meet Aboriginal needs. This would primarily be aimed at workers in health and social services, the judicial system and DYPs.

Critics pointed out that the Québec police force does not understand Aboriginal realities. They insisted that police officers who patrol in and around these communities or carry out investigations on Aboriginal territory should be better trained.

According to Québec Native Women, it is important that training for non-Aboriginal partners be designed and delivered by Aboriginal organizations, which are in the best position to convey knowledge and expertise on the culture and realities of First Nations and Inuit Peoples. We ask the government to expand its training programs, working closely with partners who are versed in historic and current Aboriginal realities.

### Keeping Knowledge Current and Pursuing Continuing Education

The people we met with told us that continuing education should be maintained for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners. Given the diversity of nations and the changes currently taking place in communities, it is important to keep knowledge about the living conditions of First Nations and Inuit Peoples current to better meet their needs.

We believe mechanisms should be established to monitor the living conditions of Aboriginal women over the next few years. A better understanding of their realities would allow stakeholders to act more effectively in different areas.

We ask that the Government of Québec work with Aboriginal partners to determine the most appropriate mechanisms for monitoring developments in these communities, including issues related to violence. Observations by the people and groups involved should be disseminated so that programs and resources can be tailored accordingly.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Federal jurisdiction over Aboriginal affairs must not overshadow the Québec government's responsibilities to First Nations and Inuit Peoples. The objective of this order was to determine how the Québec government, within its purview, can support Aboriginal communities' efforts to improve women's living conditions and combat domestic, family and sexual violence.

We heard from First Nations and Inuit community workers and community members. Our recommendations echo the solutions proposed by the groups and individuals we met with. It is now up to the Government of Québec to implement them, working closely with Aboriginal partners. First Nations and Inuit Peoples are in the best position to determine their needs and how to meet them.

Carrying out this order was an opportunity for the members of the Committee on Citizen Relations to listen to and work with First Nations and Inuit Peoples. The process must continue in other areas, particularly within the Québec government.

Therefore, the Committee on Citizen Relations recommends:

## **1. THAT the Government of Québec work with aboriginal partners to:**

- Review elementary and high school education programs in order to introduce an educational aspect on the history and current realities of Aboriginal Peoples for students
- Review elementary and high school teaching programs to introduce a 45-hour compulsory course on history and current realities of Aboriginal Peoples for future teachers

## **2. THAT the Government of Québec work with Aboriginal partners to:**

- Actively contribute to boosting and diversifying the housing supply in all Aboriginal communities experiencing a shortage
- Revise the rules for allocating and funding low-income housing to adapt them to Aboriginal realities, particularly in remote communities

## **3. THAT the Government of Québec work with Aboriginal partners to:**

- Support Aboriginal initiatives to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence

- Support the establishment, maintenance and operation of shelters for abused women in Aboriginal communities that desire them
- Revisit the eligibility criteria and intervention procedures for abused women's shelters in the public system with a view to improving services for Aboriginal Peoples

**4. THAT the Government of Québec work with Aboriginal partners to:**

- Support the establishment of healing centres in Aboriginal communities that desire them
- Develop a mechanism to get various government entities to recognize traditional Aboriginal healing practices and tools
- Support Aboriginal initiatives to establish community restorative justice mechanisms

**5. THAT the Government of Québec:**

- Support the training of Aboriginal workers in areas identified as priority by Aboriginal communities
- Ensure that Québec civil service and parapublic sector personnel and members of the police forces working in Aboriginal communities receive training tailored to the realities of these communities



# LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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## APPENDIX I – LIST OF INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS TAKING PART IN THE COMMITTEE’S WORK

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### **HEARINGS**

Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador

Executive Committee of Kativik Regional Government

First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission

Mrs. Carole Lévesque, professor, Institut national de la recherche scientifique

Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Direction des affaires autochtones

Quebec Native Women

Regroupement des centres d’amitié autochtones

Mrs. Michèle Rouleau, President of Quebec Native Women from 1987 to 1992

Secrétariat à la condition féminine

Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones

### **PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS MET WITH OR VISITED**

Anishnabe Community of Lac Simon, especially:

Mrs. Adrienne Jérôme, Chief and representative of the First Nations Advisory Committee

Mrs. Pamela Papatie, Vice-Chief

Mr. Martin Thibault, Police chief

Mr. Jean-Marie Papatie, Councillor

Mrs. Patricia Larivière, Social worker

Mrs. Élisabeth Papatie, Social worker

Mrs. Michèle Audette, President of Quebec Native Women from 1998 to 2004 and from 2010 to 2012

Mrs. Marjolaine Étienne, Vice-Chief for External Affairs from June 2013 to May 2017, Mashteuiatsh Community, as well as representative of the First Nations Advisory Committee from April 2016 to January 2017

Staff of Family House in Inukjuak

Staff of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, especially:

Mrs. Marjolaine Sioui, Director General

Mrs. Valérie Vennes, Social Crises and Family Violence Prevention Advisor

Huron-Wendat Nation, especially:

Mrs. Line Gros-Louis, Chief responsible for the Status of Women

Mr. René Gros-Louis, Chief responsible for Health and Social Services

Mr. Pierre Lepage, anthropologist and author of *Mythes et réalités sur les peuples autochtones*

Staff of Missinak Community House and its healing centre, especially Mrs. Pénélope Guay, Executive Director

Municipal council and local stakeholders of Inukjuak, especially:

Mr. Shaomik Inukpuk, Town Manager

Staff of Kativik Regional Government, especially:

Mrs. Jennifer Munick, Chairperson

Mr. Michael Gordon, Director General

Kativik Regional Police Force, especially:

Mr. Michel Martin, Police Chief

Municipal Council of Kuujuaq

Staff of Makivik Corporation, especially:

Mr. Joë Lance, Assistant to the Makivik President

Staff of Marie-Paule-Sioui-Vincent Health Center, especially:

Mr. René Picard, Director of Health and Social Services

Mr. Guy Duchesneau, Assistant Director of Social Services

Mrs. Atshukué Boudreault, Social worker

Mrs. Milaine Perron, Psychologist

Staff of Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, especially:  
Mrs. Minnie Grey, Executive Director

Mr. Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador

Quebec Native Women, especially:

Mrs. Viviane Michel, President

Mrs. Josiane Loiselle-Boudreau, Health Coordinator from 2010 to 2018

Staff of Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec, especially:

Mrs. Tanya Sirois, Director General

Mrs. Édith Cloutier, Director General of Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre and President of the Regroupement from 1991 to 1998, from 2000 à 2001 and from 2003 to 2016

Staff of Sapumijiit – Crime Victims Assistance Centre (CAVAC)

Staff of Saturviit – Inuit Women's Association of Nunavik

Staff of Tungasuvvik Women's Shelter

## APPENDIX II – LIST OF STUDIES AND REPORTS CONSULTED

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1. Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones (Commission Dussault-Erasmus), *Rapport de la Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones* (1996).
2. Commission de vérité et de réconciliation du Canada, *Honorer la vérité, réconcilier pour l'avenir. Sommaire du rapport final de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada* (2015).
3. Femmes Autochtones du Québec, *Nānīawig Māmawe Nīnawind. Debout et solidaires. Femmes autochtones disparues ou assassinées au Québec* (2015).
4. Femmes Autochtones du Québec, *Recommandations de mesures dans le cadre de la mise en œuvre des travaux portant sur le troisième Plan d'action gouvernemental en matière d'agression sexuelle* (2014).
5. Femmes Autochtones du Québec, *Mémoire : Pour que l'égalité de droit devienne une égalité de fait – Vers un deuxième plan d'action pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes* (2011).
6. Femmes Autochtones du Québec, *Les femmes autochtones et la violence* (2008).
7. Femmes Autochtones du Québec, *Discrimination des femmes autochtones* (2001).
8. Saturviit – Association des femmes inuit du Nunavik, *Rapport d'étude sur la vie et les préoccupations des femmes inuit du Nunavik* (2015).
9. Ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux, Direction générale de la planification, de l'évaluation et de la qualité, *Mémoire présenté à la Commission des relations avec les citoyens – mandat d'initiative sur les conditions de vie des femmes autochtones en lien avec les agressions sexuelles et la violence conjugale* (2016).
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