

# Message from Yukon Advisory Committee on MMIWG2S+

Identifying Priorities for 2022

Just seventeen months ago, we joined together in to pledge our commitment to end violence against Indigenous women and to work together to implement *Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity and Justice: Yukon's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-spirit+ People Strategy*. Since that time, the Yukon Advisory Committee has been working to create an Implementation Plan, something to provide guidance and greater specificity to the Strategy. We have learned together that this work is more complex, requires more input, and will take more time than we imagined. We are committed to doing this right.


In the undertaking of this work, priorities have emerged for the Yukon Advisory Committee that we want to share with you. These priorities emerge from multiple discussion points in each of the four paths of the Strategy and connect to many of the 31 action items. **These ten items represent critical and timely work that must be started immediately.**

**Commemoration:** This year, we know that the country – and the territory – will continue to respond to the recovery of unmarked graves at residential schools. As this work is undertaken, action item 1.2 on commemoration must be a priority. In particular, support must be provided to families to repatriate their loved ones in accordance with cultural protocols as they choose, including restoring graves, fencing, and markers. Recognizing that this process may result in repeated trauma, anger, sadness, and a range of responses, counselling and other culturally relevant supports must be made available during this process.

**Land-based Infrastructure and Programming:** We know that for our people, land is healing. During the substance use emergency that our territory is experiencing, conversations on this topic were renewed. It is urgent that a range of land-based infrastructure and programming be developed, including flexible, community based camps and more permanent, culturally-relevant healing centres in regions across the territory, action item 1.5.

**UNDRIP:** On June 21, 2021, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* became federal law in Canada. We note that many partners and signatories are now undertaking engagement internally or with partners and community members to determine what this may mean for Yukon. As such, considering the application of UNDRIP in the context of Yukon's Final Agreements, other modern treaties, and the evolving relationship with First Nations government with agreements, action item 1.8, is a key timely priority for the year ahead.

**Community Safety Assessments, Planning, and Implementation:** We have seen great strides in advancing action item 2.1, and this must remain a priority. Community safety assessments, planning, and implementation are emerging nationally as a best practice; this restores community ownership over the safety of citizens; provides a decolonized and alternate method to policing; and can provide communities with the tools they need to enact real change.



We also recognize the limits of these programs, both in terms of funding available, but also in terms of scope. This does not fully address perpetrator accountability, which we must always hold at the front of our minds in order to uphold dignity and justice for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-spirit+ people.

**Strengthening and Improving Sexualized Assault and Violence Response Programs:** We recognize the development and planned expansion of new programs like the Sexualized Assault Response Team, but major gaps in the supports and response to violence remain. We recognize the need for Indigenous-led victim supports, navigation of criminal justice systems, and victim-centred advocacy. Action item 2.5 must be a key priority immediately while we continue to seek long-term change in legal systems, processes, and Criminal Code that will better uphold dignity and justice for victims.

**Resource Extraction and Major Infrastructure Projects:** Many advocates and researchers have noted the negative impacts that resource extraction and major infrastructure projects have on communities. We recognize key changes in recent decision documents from the Yukon Economic and Socio-economic Assessment Board to address and prevent violence on work sites. We also recognize the willingness of some private sector companies to work with Indigenous women's organizations to address this problem. It must be a key priority to mitigate the harm and increase the positive benefits of resource extraction and major infrastructure projects, action item 3.4. This will include implementing policies that promote zero tolerance towards all forms of racism and violence and practices that support a healthy and supportive work environment for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-spirit+ Yukoners.

**Safe Housing and Freedom from Poverty:** Having a safe, affordable place to call home is critical for all Yukoners. This is acutely true for those experiencing violence. We recognize the immediate need for greater investment in housing across the spectrum from emergency to permanent housing. It must be an immediate priority to identify the need in communities for emergency shelters for those experiencing gender-based violence, transitional housing, and supportive permanent housing, action item 3.6.

**Indigenous Women's Organizations:** Grassroots organizations hold a unique expertise in our communities and will be a key partner on much of the work identified in Yukon's MMIWG2S+ Strategy. Ensuring sustainable, long-term funding for Indigenous women's organizations, action item 4.5, must be a critical priority, so that these organizations have the capacity to undertake the work ahead.

**Strategy Accountability Framework:** We are accountable to ourselves for the commitment we each made; to each other as partners in the work; but above all, we are accountable to families and survivors who have been sharing their experiences and advocating for change with honesty, bravery, and integrity. Therefore, it must be a priority in the short-term to develop a fulsome strategy accountability framework, action item 4.6, to ensure the longevity and sustainability of this Strategy

**MMIWG2S+ Trust Fund:** Family members and survivors will continue to experience a variety of emergency needs related to the violence they have experienced. We also know that many partners and contributors want to find a way to be part of this work financially. With that recognition, we urge work to begin to establish an MMIWG2S+ Trust Fund, action item 4.8.

Thank you for your renewed commitment to the urgent work in front of us. We look forward to walking in partnership with you for the years ahead.

