

# Reconciliation with Indigenous Women



The role of municipalities and service system managers in improving Indigenous women's safety and responding to the national crisis of MMIWG

2024 OMSSA Policy Conference

# The Ontario Native Women's Association

- Largest and oldest Indigenous women's organization in Canada, with over 50 years of experience and expertise in amplifying Indigenous women's voices and advocating for solutions created and led by Indigenous women for Indigenous women.
- Established in 1971 to empower and support all Indigenous women and their families through research, advocacy, policy development, community development and culturally grounded service delivery.
- Both a membership association, representing 35+ Indigenous women's groups across Ontario, and a front-line service delivery organization, delivering 76+ projects/programs in 26 sites across province.

## Vision

ONWA's celebrates and honours the safety and healing of Indigenous women and girls as they take up their leadership roles in the family, community and internationally for generations to come.

Our work is based on the principle that when Indigenous women and girls are healthy and safe, our communities then become healthy and safe. We know that in lifting Indigenous women, we elevate the safety of all.

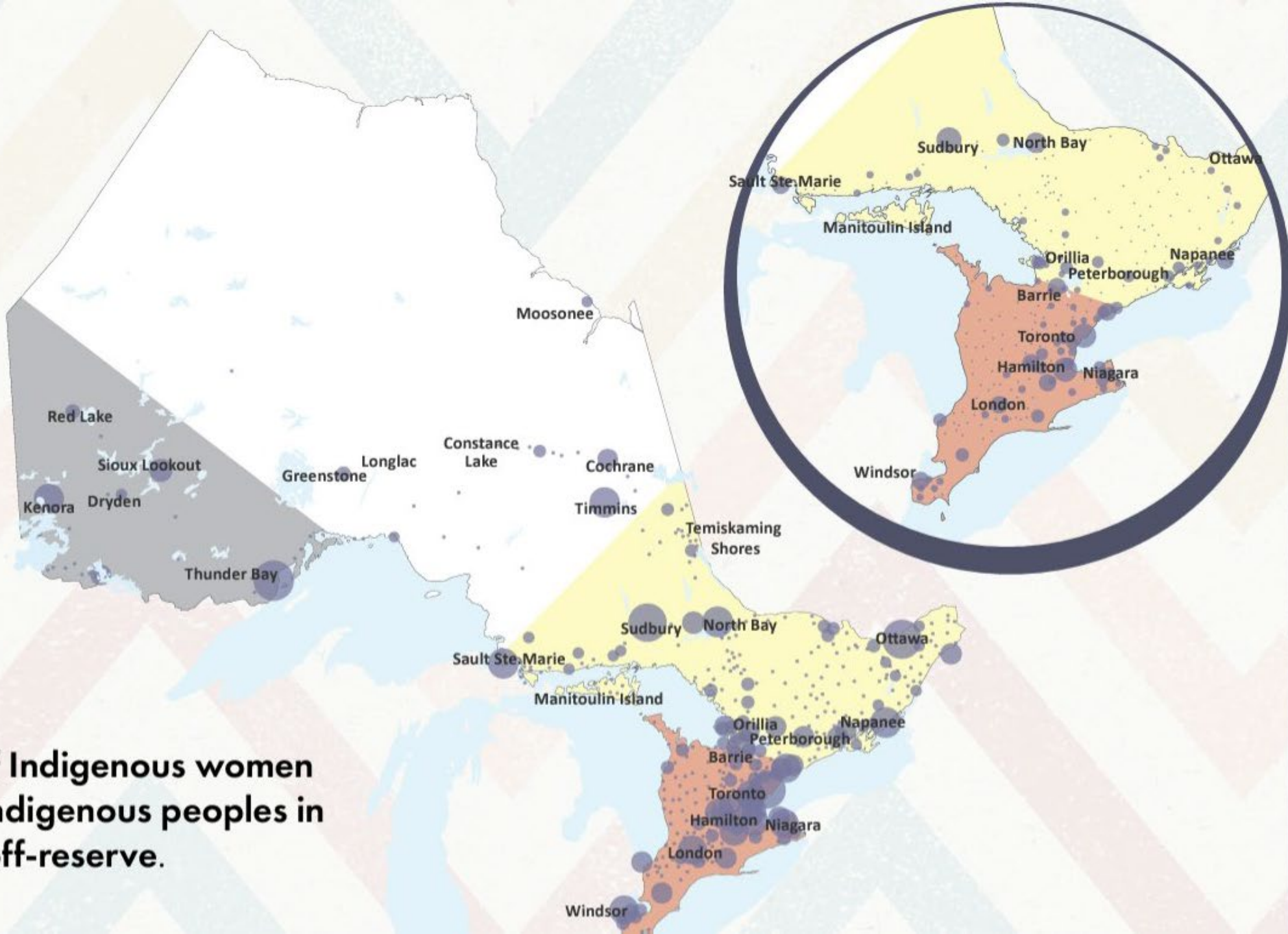
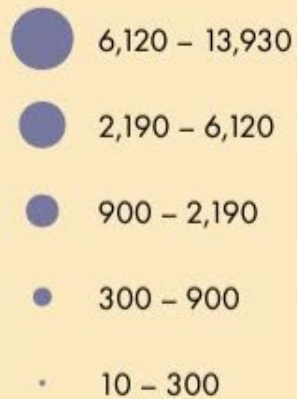
*\* ONWA welcomes and has always been inclusive of all self-identifying Indigenous women and girls, including Two-Spirit people. This includes welcoming the many social identities that we each hold.*

# Indigenous Women



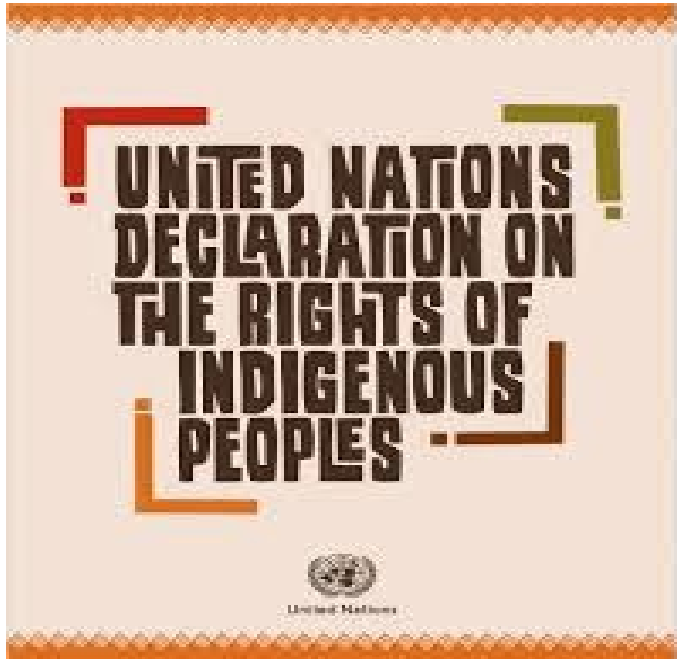
- First Nations (status and non-status), Métis and Inuit
- Strong and resilient – we are the medicine needed to heal ourselves, families, and communities
- Experts in our lives and our organizations are uniquely positioned to respond our needs
- Hold inherent rights, which are affirmed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Have the right to be involved in decisions making on the issues that impact us and our families
- Rapidly growing population in Ontario and Canada – much more than the rest of the female population in Ontario and Canada
- Increasing moving into urban spaces. 88%<sup>1</sup> of Indigenous peoples in Ontario live outside of First Nation communities in municipalities across the province – we are residents and constituents in municipalities

## Population of Indigenous women



Today, **88% of Indigenous women and 88% of Indigenous peoples in Ontario live off-reserve.**

# The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



## FOUR KEY PILLARS:

- The right to self-determination
- The right to be recognized as distinct Peoples
- The right to free, prior, and informed consent
- The right to be free from discrimination.

- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of Indigenous Peoples – it's a roadmap to advance lasting reconciliation.
- It establishes a universal framework of *minimum standards* for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples of the world.
- Adopted by the United Nations in 2007 - took over 25 years!
- Canada officially endorsed the UN Declaration in 2016; and implemented legislation (the UNDRIP Act) in 2021.

All levels of government – including municipalities and their partners – have a role and responsibility to implement UNDRIP in their work

# Violence against Indigenous Women

- Indigenous women experience significantly higher rates of gender-based violence and have unique and distinct experiences because of colonization
  - 63% of Indigenous women in Canada have experienced violent victimization in their lifetime (vs 45% of non-Indigenous women)<sup>2</sup>
  - 12 times more likely to go missing or be murdered than any other women in Canada<sup>3</sup>
  - 3 times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous women in Ontario<sup>4</sup>
- Indigenous women are at higher risk of experiencing *intimate partner violence*, and acts of violence are often more frequent and more severe
  - 61% of Indigenous women in Canada experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime (vs 44% non-Indigenous women)<sup>5</sup>
  - 8 times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be victims of intimate partner homicide than non-Indigenous women in Canada<sup>6</sup>
- National Inquiry into MMIWG2S+ → violence against Indigenous women and girls amounts to “race-based, gender-based genocide” rooted in colonization, historical/ongoing trauma, racism, and sexism
  - The proportion of femicide victims who are Indigenous in Ontario has steadily increased since the 2019 National Inquiry into MMIWG, from 5.4% in 2019-20 to 8.1% in 2022-23.<sup>7</sup>

# Intersectionality

- Disparities exist in services available to Indigenous women depending on where they live.
- Some groups of Indigenous women at even greater risk of experiencing gender-based violence:
  - Child welfare involvement – Indigenous women are almost 6 times more likely than non-Indigenous women (11% vs 2.3%) to have been under the legal responsibility of the government (e.g. child welfare), and 81% who were ever under the legal responsibility of the government have experienced violent victimization in their lifetime<sup>8</sup>
  - Homelessness – Indigenous women are almost 5 times more likely than non-Indigenous women (9.4% vs 1.9%) to have ever experienced homelessness, and 91% of Indigenous women who experienced homelessness also experienced violent victimization<sup>9</sup>
  - Disability – 74% of Indigenous women with a disability experienced violent victimization<sup>10</sup>
  - Gender diversity – 86% of Indigenous women who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ reported experiencing intimate partner violence<sup>11</sup>
  - Poverty – Indigenous women have lower median incomes and are more likely than non-Indigenous Canadians to be living in poverty; for example, 20% of First Nations women living off-reserve are in low-income situations (vs 11% of non-Indigenous women)<sup>12</sup>

# Systems Responses

- Indigenous women are often revictimized by the systems that are intended to support them
  - Face stigma, judgement, racism, discrimination and mistreatment by service providers, police, justice system that prevents them from getting supports and responses they need
  - Afraid to report sexual assaults and other violence because of poor treatment and not being taken seriously
  - Lack of trust and confidence in mainstream services and systems to meet their needs, culturally inappropriate services
- Lack of, or differential systems responses: e.g. Renfrew Inquest and National Inquiry into MMIWG2S+
  - Close to 1,200 Indigenous women were reported missing or murdered in Canada between 1980 and 2012 – that is more than 37 a year, without any level of government calling for an inquest or declaring an epidemic.
  - Numerous reports and inquiries: Helen Betty Osborn in 1971, ONWA's reports in 1990's/2000's, Amnesty International 2004, multiple UN human rights bodies
  - MMIWG2S+ National Inquiry (2016-2019) resulted in a Final Report with [231 Calls for Justice](#) – little progress (2 completed), 56 recommendations apply to local government

Has your municipality declared intimate partner violence an epidemic?

Have you read the Calls for Justice, or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls for Action?





# ONWA's Programs and Services

## Centralized Intake & Brief Intervention Services

### Health

- Community Health Outreach Workers
- Ska-Be "Helper" Program
- Mindimooyenh Health Clinic
- Youth Life Promotion

### Family Wellness

- Indigenous Healthy Babies Healthy Children
- Community Wellness
- Youth in Transition Workers
- Breaking Free from Family Violence
- Child Welfare Advocates

### Crisis Intervention

- Nihdawin (Housing Supports)
- Courage for Change (Anti-Human Trafficking)
- Youth in Transition Workers - Human Trafficking
- Indigenous Sexual Assault Workers

### Justice

- Gladue Writers and Gladue Aftercare
- Youth Cultural Intervention
- Indigenous Victim and Family Liaisons

### Mental Health and Stabilization

- Trauma Informed Care
- Mental Health and Wellness
- Day Treatment
- Land Based Healing

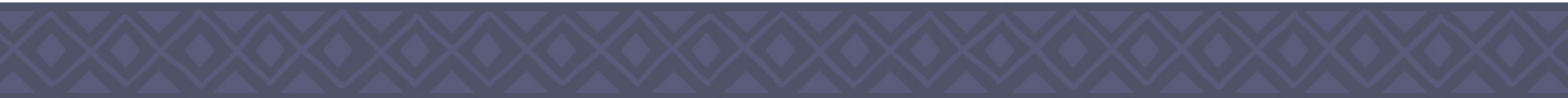
Wholistic wrap around supports: ONWA provides services across the continuum, recognizing the multifaceted nature of the issues that Indigenous women face and the multiple systems that perpetuate violence against them.

# ONWA's Community Development and Capacity Building

Education, awareness and capacity development programs across the province to empower communities to address issues that affect Indigenous women and their families, including violence.

Examples:

- Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Liaisons
- Mental Health and Addictions Anti-Human Trafficking Liaison
- Community Safety Liaison
- Indigenous Sexual Violence Awareness Training
- MMIWG Family Support

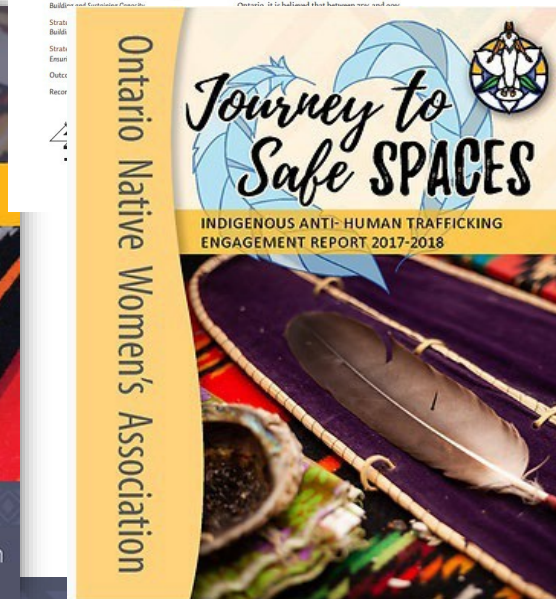
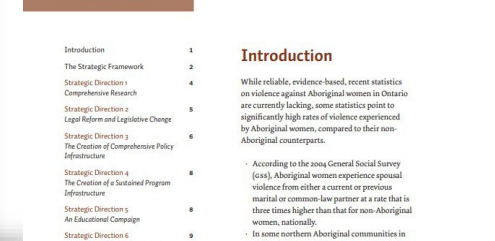
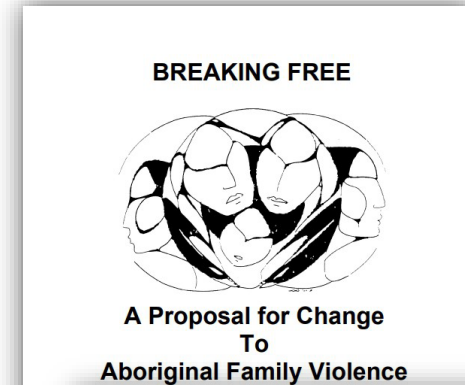


# ONWA's Advocacy for Indigenous Women's Safety

Decades of reports and recommendations:

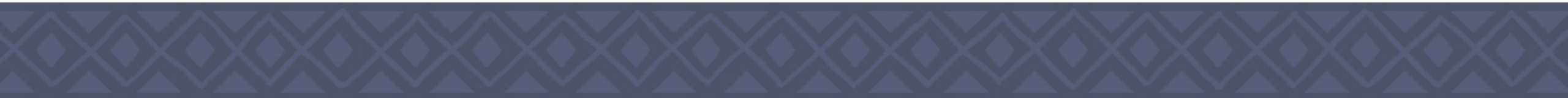
- [Breaking Free From Family Violence Report \(1989\)](#)
- [Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Indigenous Women \(2007\)](#)
- [Breaking Free Breaking Through \(2015\)](#)
- [Journey to Safe Spaces \(2019\)](#)
- [Reconciliation With Indigenous Women Report \(2020\)](#)
- [Indigenous Women's Advisory Council Statement in response to Bill 173 \(2024\)](#)

Read our reports here →



# Recommendations from Indigenous Women

1. Explicitly recognize the disproportionate rates of violence against Indigenous women, their unique and intersectional experiences, and the root causes in all declarations and responses to IPV.
2. Prioritize Indigenous women's safety at all levels of government in all policies, plans, and strategies that impact, or have the potential to impact, the lives of Indigenous women.
3. Involve Indigenous women in the development of all legislative, policy, program and service responses to the issues that impact them, including gender-based violence.
4. Increased and sustainable funding (incl. capital \$) for community-based culturally grounded services, with focus on prevention and family and community healing.
5. Implement a community development approach that enables varied solutions which are unique to each community and supports capacity building of Indigenous women's organizations and Indigenous women's leadership.





# Key Takeaways: Working with Indigenous Women's Organizations to Address Gender Based Violence

We encourage you to:

- Understand your role and responsibilities in addressing gender-based violence against Indigenous women
- Proactively build relationships and collaborate with Indigenous women's organizations
- Provide resources (including funding, spaces) to support Indigenous women's organizations
- Include Indigenous women's safety as a priority in your responses to IPV epidemic declarations and community plans (e.g. Community Safety and Wellbeing Plans)

What should you consider when taking action to address gender-based violence?

- Understand what Indigenous women's organizations know and are doing about the issue. It is likely that Indigenous women's organizations have identified solutions that could be supported/funded
- Consider the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S+, and ONWA reports
- Involve Indigenous women's organizations in the decision-making process, and support Indigenous women's leadership on the issue
- Consider how does/will this impact Indigenous women's wellbeing, their right to safety and to self-determination

Does your municipality specifically include improving the safety of Indigenous women in your Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan?



# Working with Indigenous Women's Organizations

## Why refer to, fund and/or work with to ONWA or other Indigenous women's organizations?

- Indigenous women are the experts in their lives and their organizations are uniquely positioned to respond their needs.
- Indigenous women's organizations have decades of experience delivering culturally grounded services to improve the safety and social determinants of health affecting the wellbeing of Indigenous women, their families and communities.
- Service System Managers have responsibilities to uphold Indigenous Peoples inherent rights and to implement the United Nations Declaration, the TRC's Calls to Action and the MMIWG Calls to Justice

## When should you reach out to ONWA or other local Indigenous women's organizations?

Reach out to ONWA or Indigenous women's organizations when:

- Working with Indigenous women who may need services and supports (referrals)
- Identifying community trends and emerging issues and developing action plans and strategies to address these – including gender-based violence, community safety and wellbeing, housing/homelessness, childcare and early years, employment and income security/social assistance
- Designing and evaluating services, programs and policy/implementation
- Considering training, education and capacity building for your staff around trauma informed care and cultural competency to ensure they understand the unique experiences of Indigenous women.

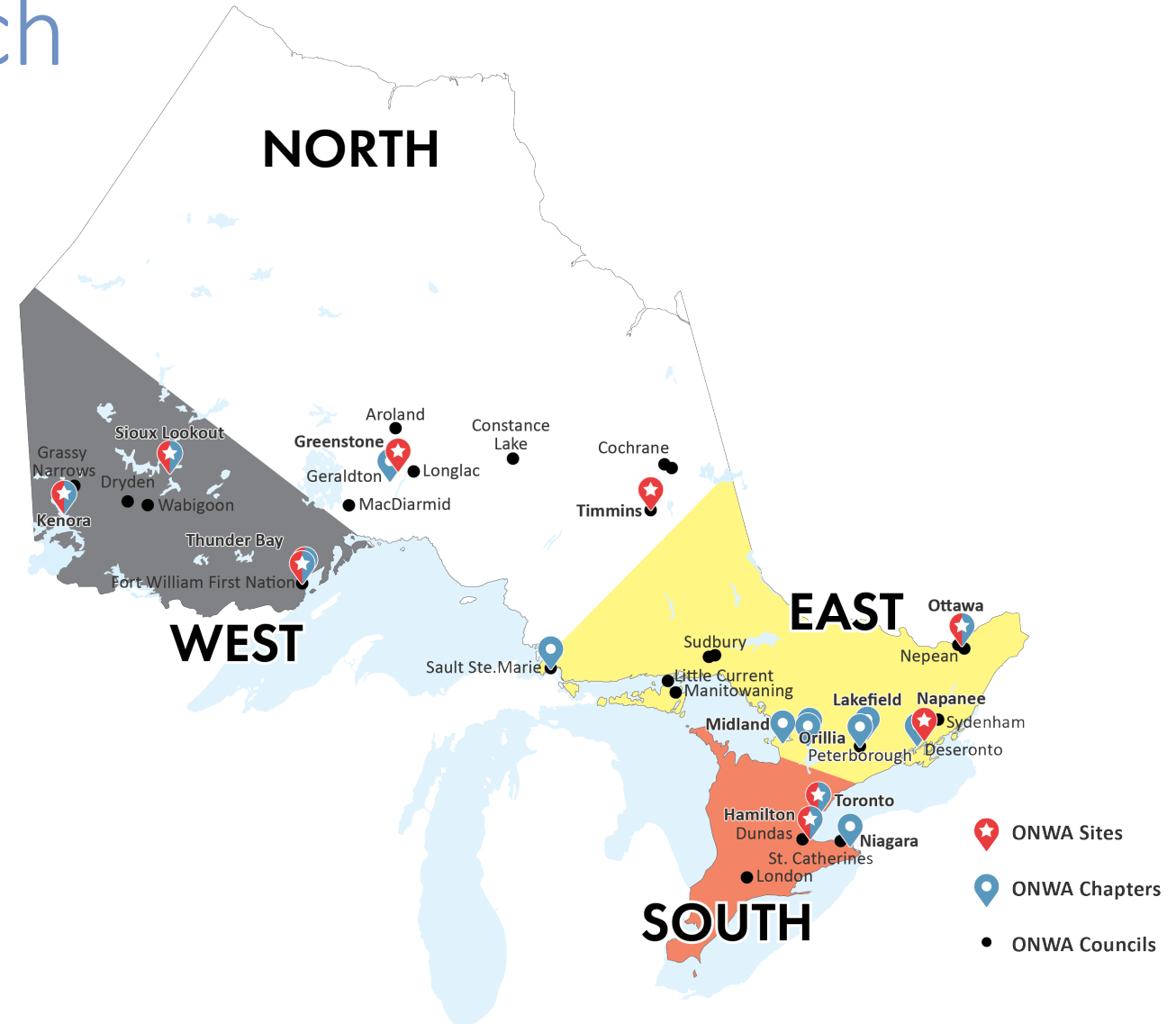
# ONWA's Provincial Reach

## Membership:

- 16 Chapters (incorporated Indigenous women's organizations providing frontline services)
- 23 Councils (grassroots Indigenous women's groups supporting community development models)

## Services/projects/programs in 26 sites:

- 10 of these sites are direct service delivery sites, and the remaining 16 are through our membership organizations (Chapters).



# Consequences of Excluding Indigenous Women and their Voices

- Perpetuation of colonial violence and continued silencing Indigenous women
- Violate our rights affirmed in the UN Declaration
- Fail to address the root causes (colonization, racism, sexism, trauma)
- Fail to recognize safety as relational
- As a result, responses will not reflect Indigenous women's needs or solutions such as:
  - Culture as the foundation for healing;
  - The need to restore balance in families, communities, and nations;
  - Importance of reclaiming Indigenous women's identity, leadership, traditional roles and responsibilities.

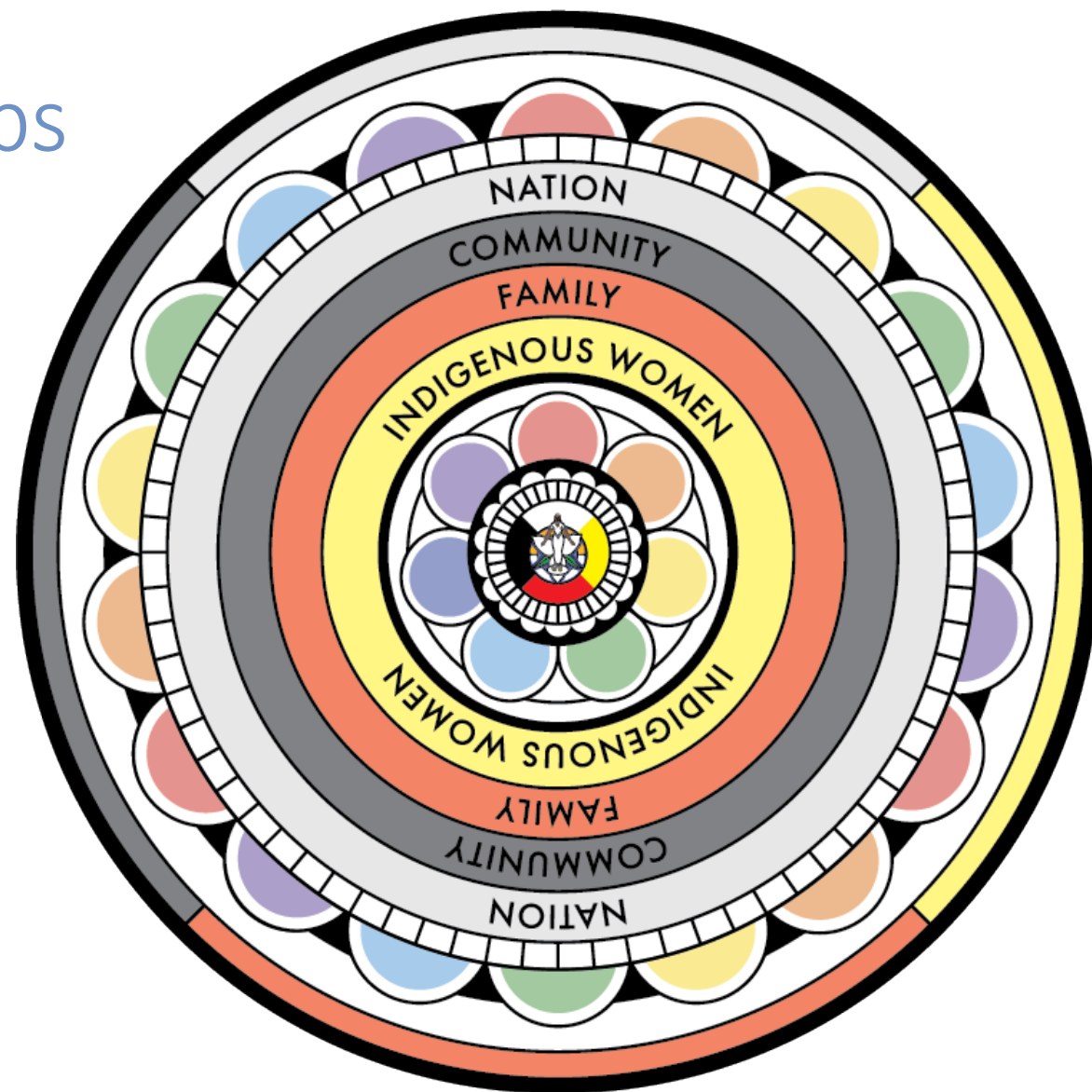




# Decolonization and Rebalancing Relationships

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

– Quote from Community Member, ONWA MMIWG Community Engagements, 2018







# Prioritizing Indigenous Women's Safety

## Housing and Homelessness

- Application of Special Priority Policy for Indigenous women affected by violence or trafficking
- Social housing offers – do not penalize women for prioritizing their safety
- Collaboration between Service Managers, social housing and Indigenous women's organizations to assist tenants to maintain housing, facilitate access to internal transfers, and receive culturally ground wrap around supports
- Support Indigenous-led housing solutions through urban Indigenous organizations, Indigenous women's organizations and Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS)

## Income Supports

- Cultural competency and trauma informed care training for case workers
- Review and amend intake and case management processes to ensure they are trauma-informed and violence-informed
- Ensure Indigenous women are fully informed of all the benefits and discretionary supports they may be eligible for; and ensure trauma-informed lens is applied in decision-making around discretionary supports.
- Build relationships with local Indigenous women's organizations to facilitate referrals, coordinate services, and understand how to better meet the needs of Indigenous women
- Co-location of case workers in Indigenous women's and urban Indigenous organizations

# A Case Study in Collaboration

- In June 2024, ONWA, Anishinabek Nation, City of Thunder Bay, Fort William First Nation, Thunder Bay Police Service and Board announced the joint development of an Urban Indigenous Community Safety Plan for Thunder Bay to address and prevent incidents of violence against Indigenous women in the city
- Distinct from Thunder Bay's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan – aims to address the unique safety concerns and priorities of Indigenous women and girls and their families
- Part of Public Safety Canada's Aboriginal Community Safety Planning Initiative (ACSPI), first of its kind for an urban centre the size of Thunder Bay
- Collaborative and community driven process – brings community members together to reflect on where the community has been and the historical impacts, and to plan how to heal and reconcile by identifying shared values, community strengths, assets, and safety and wellness goals, so that everyone takes responsibility for creating a safer community for Indigenous women
- Watch this space! Could provide a potential model for other municipalities and their partners in Ontario



# Additional Resources



Learn more about the  
Ontario Native Women's  
Association (ONWA)

[onwa.ca/welcome](https://onwa.ca/welcome)

**MIIGWETCH**  
(OJIBWE)

**KINAHNASKOMIHTIN**  
(CREE)

**NAKURMĪK**  
(INUKTITUT)

**MARSEE**  
(MICHIF)

**NIÁ:WEN**  
(MOHAWK)

**MERCI**  
(FRENCH)

**THANK YOU**  
(ENGLISH)



Learn more about the **Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA)** or follow our social media

[onwa.ca/social](https://onwa.ca/social)

# References

1. [Statistics Canada. \(2022\). Table 98-10-0264-01 Indigenous identity by Registered or Treaty Indian status and residence by Indigenous geography: Canada, provinces and territories.](#)
2. Heidinger, L. (2022). Violent Victimization: Experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in Canada, 2018. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. *Juristat*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00004-eng.htm>
3. Statistics Canada. (2023). Table 35-10-0156-01 Number, percentage and rate of homicide victims, by gender and Indigenous identity and Statistics Canada. (2015). Table 8: Total female victims of homicide, by Aboriginal identity, Canada, provinces and territories 2001 to 2014.
4. Ibid.
5. Heidinger, L. (2021). Intimate partner violence: Experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in Canada, 2018. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. *Juristat*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00004-eng.htm>
6. Dawson, M., D. Sutton, P. Jaffe, A.-L. Straatman and J. Poon, J. (2018). One is Too Many: Trends and patterns in domestic homicides in Canada 2010-2015. Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative. <http://cdhpi.ca/sites/cdhpi.ca/files/CDHPI-REPORTRV.pdf>.
7. Data derived from OAITH's Annual Femicide Lists and Reports.
8. Heidinger, L. (2022). Violent Victimization: Experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in Canada, 2018. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. *Juristat*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00004-eng.htm>
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