



FAQ

Revisiting Coordinated Access:

Fostering Indigenous Best Practices Towards a Wholistic Systems Approach to Homelessness

ABOUT THE REPORT

How can we help ensure this report results in meaningful change?

Many of the recommendations from our [report](#) have been put forth in many other reports. Looking at the [TRC Calls to Action](#) and the [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples \(RCAP\) report](#), there are many Indigenous-specific reports that have not been acted upon. One way to help ensure this isn't "just another report" is to use your own position — whether you are a community member or leader— to hold your community leadership accountable, and by recognizing that Indigenous communities need appropriate leadership, resources and supports from [Designated Communities](#) and Municipalities. Utilize your voice to make an impact wherever you are — whether it's on the ground, at certain tables, volunteering, or

participating in your municipality in some way. Use your voice to push the imperative forward.

The tone from the top is also a great avenue; instead of decision-makers mandating communities to do “this”, they could be mandating them to do “that”. In other words, **the Federal Government could start making it mandatory for communities to implement the recommendations from this report.**

You referred to the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action in the webinar for this report launch. Are there any specific calls that you see as particularly relevant or helpful?

Realistically — all of them! But specifically:

Under Child Welfare:

- **ii.** Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.
- **iii.** Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the history and impacts of residential schools.
- **iv.** Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the potential for Aboriginal communities and families to provide more appropriate solutions to family healing
- **v.** Requiring that all child-welfare decision makers consider the impact of the residential school experience on children and their caregivers.

Just change “social worker” to housing worker!

And under Health:

- **18.** We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government

policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties.

- **19.** We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal peoples, to establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes Calls to Action | 3 between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and to publish annual progress reports and assess long term trends. Such efforts would focus on indicators such as: infant mortality, maternal health, suicide, mental health, addictions, life expectancy, birth rates, infant and child health issues, chronic diseases, illness and injury incidence, and the availability of appropriate health services.
- **20.** In order to address the jurisdictional disputes concerning Aboriginal people who do not reside on reserves, we call upon the federal government to recognize, respect, and address the distinct health needs of the Métis, Inuit, and off-reserve Aboriginal peoples.
- **21.** We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools, and to ensure that the funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.
- **22.** We call upon those who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients.

Based on findings from this report, what should the general population and social workers/front-line staff know about people experiencing homelessness?

First, **we need distinct interventions and processes when working with indigenous communities; it cannot be a one-size fits all approach.** It needs to be a thoughtful process that requires a lot of engagement and discussions. For

social workers (SW), it goes back to having that training in SW courses — having those anti-racism, Indigenous cultural training embedded from day one. Indigenous homelessness is very different from homelessness, and it's important to know that. **Jesse Thistle's work — [Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada](#) — is a great place to start.** It's not just a lack of home, but a lack of identity that was taken away, so it's important for people to know that and recognize that before any work can begin. For SW — you have to build that trust with the community; the homeless population are people, they're our brothers, our sisters, nieces, nephews, so don't look at them from the outside-in, think of them as your family. To Social Workers: get out there and volunteer — if this is the avenue you want to be passionate about and invest your life in then go out there and volunteer with that population and gain that experience before moving forward. Give back to the community.

Does the report offer recommendations for interrupting the disproportionate flow of Indigenous youth from care into homelessness?

Yes! **See Recommendation #8:** In order to ensure that no Indigenous person or family falls through cracks created by the lack of systems integration and system failures, representation from the child welfare sector, the correctional system, the mental health system, the hospital system, and other systems unique to each community should be convened with Indigenous housing and homelessness tables, particularly those related to coordinated access. [Link to the report](#)

This report frames its data as "Indigenous data" collected by Indigenous Peoples. Does the term "Indigenous" refer to Indigenous Peoples in Canada or does it extend to Indigenous Peoples in the U.S and Latin America?

Throughout the report, we are referring to Indigenous Peoples in Canada — First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Peoples. We certainly hear you that racism does not seem to differentiate between different Indigenous Peoples, however here, we are talking about the Indigenous Homelessness stream of Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, and this only includes FNMI.

Was the research process used in collecting data for this report aligned with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach?

Yes! **It wasn't explicit — we didn't go in with the intention of applying PAR, it was more Indigenous valued based research.** There's certainly a potential hybrid between the two but I think our methodology was really formed in the community. We don't really want to put a name to it because it was so organic, but there were certainly some similar elements.

If you look at the history of PAR, it is probably Indigenous since we talk about building trust and forming relationships, getting input from the real experts, etc.

Is there a similar report to this one that addresses substance use and Indigenous Peoples?

First, it is imperative to emphasize that there is no inherent relationship between Indigenous Peoples and substance use. The devastating impacts of colonization (both historic and ongoing) have led to some populations being at higher risk of substance abuse than others.

Secondly, although we can look to each other for ideas on how to address common issues, we must remember that our communities are historically, culturally, and socially distinct. When borrowing ideas from other communities we must consider what parts of the solutions and best practices working in other communities may be appropriate or inappropriate for the communities we are working with. **One of the key recommendations from the Revisioning Coordinated Access report is to invest in and support local Indigenous community leadership.**

A helpful resource for communities seeking to enhance programming and services supporting Indigenous Peoples using harmful substances is the [“Indigenous Harm Reduction = Reducing the Harms of Colonialism”](#) policy brief by the Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development.

ABOUT COORDINATED ACCESS

Will Coordinated Access (CA) enhance housing options for Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness? Do we need to have parallel CA processes, one for mainstream and one for Indigenous Peoples?

The overarching goal of Coordinated Access (CA) is to match individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness with programs and services that will support their long-term housing stability. What CA looks like in each community will be unique. **Our report promotes that Designated Communities meaningfully engage and support local Indigenous community leadership to determine how CA can best support the needs of the local Indigenous community.** We further advocate for the appropriate and sustainable funding from [ESDC](#) in Indigenous communities to ensure every community building a CA system is done so with Indigenous leadership guiding the process.

PRIORITIZATION & ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Is there another assessment or intake that can be used other than the VISPIDAT? Do you use a qualification document prior to offering services?

Not yet! **We are just getting started on a one-year project to develop an Indigenous-specific assessment tool.** More information to come on this in the coming months!

What were some key learnings in terms of developing a prioritization process and preparing for change now and in the future?

One of the components that is critical for Indigenous communities is to develop a relationship with the Designated Community (DC) — a close and trusting relationship. The DC can provide the leadership to ensure that we could build on the values and traditions of the local Indigenous community. It's important that they partner with us with regards to internal committees and that we're able to get into the mechanisms, the municipality, "in the belly of the beast", to participate in their internal functions. This is a very good process that gave us a voice at the table, not just a pat on the back, but more of a "we mean business and you're going to help us develop this from the ground up" approach. That relationship was not built overnight — it takes investment, time, negotiation. It is critical for the

mainstream (DC) to recognize that our strengths, values and processes would be very distinct from their own.

How can we ensure that information collected by assessment tools across Canada paints a broader picture of the experiences of homelessness for Indigenous Peoples?

We are just starting the process of developing an Indigenous-specific assessment tool that can be used and adapted to suit the needs of different communities across Canada. In order to develop the tool, regional focus groups will be held so that we can get various perspectives, teachings, and other cultural elements to include in the tool/process. While different communities may have different success indicators, these should always be developed and monitored by the Indigenous community. Moreover, Indigenous communities should be the stewards of their data — this will ensure that whatever information is collected is 1) relevant, 2) culturally appropriate, 3) is strengths-based, and 4) reflective of Indigenous worldviews.

What factors are used in prioritization for Indigenous people in Hamilton, Ontario?

Prioritization for Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness in Hamilton is guided by community input, evidence (including statistics from our Indigenous programs and services as well as external research), **consultations** with mainstream partners as well as the **expertise of local Indigenous leadership**. We use these sources to strategize how best to meet the needs of our community.

DATA SOVEREIGNTY & DATA COLLECTION

Do you have an example or ideas of how to ensure data sovereignty?

Here in Canada, we strive to abide by the **OCAP Principles: Ownership, Control, Access and Possession**. These were developed by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC).

You can learn more about OCAP here: <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>

The FNIGC has also developed a First Nations Data Governance Strategy:

https://fnigc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/FNIGC_FNDGS_report_EN_FINAL.pdf

With respect to homelessness, data sovereignty is still something we're working on and trying to ensure with the use of HIFIS, a data management system for the homeless serving sector.

I find mainstream data collection methods/intake methods intimidating. Are there other ways to do this work?

You might have a policy on how to collect data but **it's the procedure that's important**; if we can't change the policy we should at least be attempting to change the procedure and that would be changing the methodology of how it's applied. Look at Point-in-Time (PiT) Counts, we were mandated to do this — there wasn't a way out of it and we couldn't change that policy so instead, we worked out a strategy and methodology for the implementation of that policy. Try to change the process. If there's something wrong with a process, then say so! If you want to change it, you have to be a strong person and have a strong voice and put it forward that you would like to see the procedure implemented differently.

FUNDING & RESOURCES

Have the federal or provincial governments allocated funding to address Indigenous homelessness — specifically to build housing for urban Indigenous Peoples?

That 3-way relationship between the federal governments, provincial governments and regions/municipalities is different in every province.

Yes, there is funding going into housing. There should be capital, and barriers to capital projects which is often what you need with regards to increasing housing are enormous in the Indigenous community. It's important to have a working relationship with the municipality because when you're trying to get a housing development project off the ground, variances and bylaws are a challenge. It would be nice to have a top-down comparative mandate that municipalities must change their variances and bylaws requested by the Indigenous community. Could we use more money? Yes. The Rapid

Housing Initiative (RHI) is coming—but one of the problems there is that it's fast money, fast timelines, "heads in beds within 18 months".

Accessing land is a really good first start—it would be great if people would just give us land since it was ours to begin with. Give it to us to take care of it as stewards of that property.

Land acquisition is a huge part of capital process, as Indigenous communities, we have a lot of barriers and challenges and would like to see something done in that arena, not just giving us the money. It's not just about the money, it's about the implementation and making that implementation as easy as possible to increase the housing stock for Indigenous peoples.

Should allocations for new housing reflect the percentage of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness in the community?

Yes! **Some communities have made arrangements to receive a percentage of housing stock that is reflective of the percentage of Indigenous peoples who are unhoused.** Don't be shy to bring this up and advocate for this at your next community meeting! This is a move towards equity.

What are the successes and the challenges of hiring Indigenous workers within mainstream organizations, as opposed to increasing resources for Indigenous led organizations?

One success is the increased capacity of our next generation. We have to build capacity for the next generation and the generation after that. A challenge might be that they don't get paid enough; unfortunately, that's still something we need to work on and learn to pay our people the same pay rates as the mainstream or non-Indigenous stream.

WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS

How can a community that started with a one-size fits all approach pivot to separate the designated and Indigenous streams?

The way that we (the Indigenous community) worked with the municipality was that we presented our reports and info on the 5-1 rule; we only represented 1.8% of population in Hamilton but conservatively represented at least 20% of overall homeless population. The request was "We want 1/5th of the funding based on that strategy." We did get that.

It would be better to work to find priorities together and make decisions together as a collective. Start building that relationship, reaching out to your Indigenous community leadership, provide them with resources and support, and start involving them to get to those decision making tables. We often see one Indigenous representative sitting at multiple decision making tables, whereas the municipality has a team of 10-12 people. So ensure your partners have the capacity to participate in decision making tables and that they have the resources to participate in that leadership role. Recognize that there's strength in having a diverse leadership at your decision making table—you may not always agree because you're coming from different experiences, there will likely be conflict, but you need to trust in your partner and in the knowledge and expertise of your partners at the table.

ENGAGING WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

What are some ways to engage Indigenous communities during a pandemic and the post-pandemic recovery ?

We're getting better at it! [Zoom](#) has become a very useful platform. **Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, we've been engaging with the community at-large.** We've been working with community coordinators on the ground talking to community members on a 1:1 basis. You learn so much about someone during those 1:1 conversations. We do a lot of wellness checks in service provision by Indigenous agencies. Facebook is also an excellent way — we use the Hamilton Indigenous Community Facebook page to share information or put out calls for engagement with the community.

When there's a will there's a way! Strategies for engagement can still be applied during a pandemic. If you talk to your local community, they will tell you the best way to engage with them.

Review existing programs and services to see how they have been connecting with community. Consider partnering with external and mainstream agencies or programming to broaden your reach. Remember to take accessibility into consideration. If online communication is reaching most but not all of a community,

think about how you can support community members without internet access or who are not comfortable with online activities.

Is there a framework or protocol that you use to conduct engagement?

A really **great resource that can help to guide relationships between streams is the [Meeting in the Middle](#) document developed in Toronto**. You could adapt this document to better suit the needs of your community or develop something similar!

Have you encountered any methods which could engage non-Indigenous financial members of organizations with Indigenous worldviews?

Supporting our brothers and sisters in other communities is part of why we wanted to share what we are doing in Hamilton. Building and nurturing relationships with mainstream partners requires intentional investment (time and resources). The trust and relationship between the City of Hamilton and the Indigenous community of Hamilton was built up over many years and was nurtured on both sides. Now we are at the point where the City of Hamilton invests 20% of their Reaching Home funding in the Indigenous community and the Indigenous community autonomously decides how those monies are spent. **We hope by publishing documents like this, other communities can point to what we are doing, what Toronto is doing and advocate for similar initiatives for their communities.**

The “20% Rule” for our community is based on the City’s own data that has shown 20% of those experiencing homelessness in the City of Hamilton identify as Indigenous. A starting point for other communities might be to look at their data and build an argument for appropriate funds from there. **Pull from local, regional, and national documents that support Indigenous-led solutions.**

How can Community Entities (CEs) start to create Community Advisory Boards (CAB) and engage Indigenous agencies more inclusively?

Your partners in the Indigenous community should be invited to any and all decision-making tables that you’re a part of. It is critical to reach out to them and begin to build relationships so that they can be involved in every step of the process — not just advisors. To create a CAB, you have to ask “Who are our

stakeholders here? Who is working on homelessness in my community?" It's also about creating space for Indigenous leadership and groups to come in and share their expertise — they know how to best serve their people and we need those voices in order to be able to address homelessness in every community across Canada.

If you are hosting the decision-making tables, consider how to make them more accessible and supportive to Indigenous partners. For example, consulting Indigenous partners for availability prior to setting the meeting dates and times.

SUPPORTING INDIGNEOUS COMMUNITIES

How can I be of service in my community as a non-Indigenous person to build more compassion and understanding?

Volunteer! **Volunteering is a fantastic way to gain experience, meet new people, and make a real difference in your community.** If you're not able to volunteer, try to be an engaged community member. Attend events, pow wows, and support Indigenous businesses. Also, take the time to learn about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Learn about what it was like pre-contact, residential schools, the sixties scoop, MMIWG, the displacement of the Métis, the High Arctic relocation, different treaties, and the Indian Act. There's just so much out there that can help you get a greater understanding of Indigenous issues, thereby building more compassion. I think that when you do this, it will seep out into all your relations and you will be an agent of change.

Are there models of municipalities (non-designated entities) providing resources to Indigenous organizations to support relationship building?

Go to the tables of Indigenous organizations to support their initiatives. Go to these tables with the intention of building/nurturing relationships. Ask how you can support their work. Be transparent and share that you are seeking guidance on how to best support Indigenous Peoples in your community in a way that is respectful and reciprocal.

What trainings do you suggest for cultural sensitivity?

The best way to determine what cultural sensitivity training you should take is to talk to your local Indigenous community; they may have resources that are more specific to your region. In reality, the best way to receive this training is to genuinely engage with your local Indigenous community. Attend their events, seek to connect, and work on building relationships.

