



**FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.**  
**QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC.**

**Quebec Native Women Brief**

**As part of:**

*The Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones (QC) Consultation for the Renewal of the  
Government Action Plan for the Social and Cultural Development of the First Nations and  
Inuit*

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## **Introduction of Quebec Native Women**

Quebec Native Women (hereafter QNW) is a bilingual, non-profit organization founded in 1974 that began as a community-based initiative. Since July 2009, QNW has had consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Quebec Native Women (QNW) is an organization representing women from ten (10) First Nations of Quebec: Abenaki, Anishnabe, Attikamek, Innu, Eeyou, Wendat, Maliseet, Mig'maq, Mohawk and Naskapi. We represent First Nations women as well as urban Indigenous women. In 2015, QNW was recognized by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada as an Indigenous Representative Organization (IRO).

QNW's mission is to advocate for the human rights of Indigenous women and their families, both collectively and individually, and to represent the needs and priorities of its members to various levels of government, civil society and decision makers in all areas of activity that affect the rights of Indigenous people.

QNW has contributed to restoring the balance between Indigenous men and women by giving a strong voice to the needs and priorities of women for more than 47 years. QNW brings the needs and priorities of its members to the attention of authorities and decision makers in all areas of our work: health, youth, justice and public safety, women's shelters and the promotion of non violence, human rights, international law, as well as employment and training. In this context, we play a role in education, awareness raising and research, and provide a structure for women to be active in their communities.

## **QNW General Comments**

Before reflecting upon the questions put forward by the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones (hereafter SAA), QNW would like to elaborate on some general comments that recur in several places in our answers to the consultation questions.

1. It is important that, at the beginning of the next *Government Action Plan for the Social and Cultural Development of the First Nations and Inuit* (hereafter Action Plan), there is a specific introduction to mention that, although the plan is addressed to First Nations and Inuit in general, the interests of Indigenous women and girls must be equally represented. In fact, the issues of Indigenous people in general and Indigenous women and girls often have the same origin, but are very different. The reality facing Indigenous women and girls is one of disproportionate discrimination that prevents them from enjoying the same equality as their Indigenous male counterparts.

In this regard, our organization is aware that the Action Plan will include global actions that will be implemented according to the intended recipients. The aim of our proposal is to prevent unnecessary and meaningless duplication. However, the presence of this recommendation should in no way make the introduction an excuse for not actually implementing actions specifically directed at Indigenous women and girls. The approach must be adapted to their reality and distinctiveness.

2. The next Action Plan must be adaptable and flexible according to the changing needs over time. Different communities have different needs due to their cultural diversity. The needs of Indigenous women living in urban areas are also important to consider in the evolving set of needs.
3. The implementation of the Action Plan must be based on an approach that includes Indigenous women and girls, experts, and Indigenous organizations that have a true knowledge of Indigenous women's issues. Indigenous experts must be able to identify themselves, or be identified by their peers, without government interference. Indigenous

bodies are the bearers of knowledge and this must not be disregarded. It is not just about one consultation as a 'tick box', where Indigenous women feel used. Rather, it is about including them fully in the process, in the committees and in the follow-ups, whether before, during or after. The time for formalities with no real significance is over.

4. Finally, special attention should be paid to training. Training, no matter in which field, must be co-created by Indigenous experts and delivered by them. This ensures that Indigenous women and girls represent themselves, without being manipulated.

## **Questions put forward by the SAA**

From the outset, QNW would like to clarify how our organization responded to the questions proposed by the SAA. We have answered the questions in such a way as to categorize the issues and thus make them easier to read and understand. However, the issues provided by QNW should not be seen as individual and divided, but as a whole. They are all interrelated and sometimes the cause or consequence of one another. In this sense, these issues must be approached as a whole.

### **QUESTION 1**

*In your opinion, what are the needs and/or issues that should be the object of priority government action in terms of the social and cultural development of First Nations and Inuit?*

It is not surprising to mention, first of all, that the needs are numerous and must be addressed without delay.

#### **Recognition of Systemic Racism and Discrimination**

More generally, systemic racism and discrimination must be recognized by the Quebec government in order to continue on the path of reconciliation. QNW believes that the systemic racism and discrimination disproportionately experienced by Indigenous women and girls is at the root of the institutional issues that separate Indigenous people from the public system. Recognizing this would be a step in the right direction.

#### **Need for Education**

Actions need to be taken in relation to education in all its forms, both for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. There is a great need for education, not only institutional and academic, but also with regard to awareness and understanding of Indigenous issues. On the one hand, our Indigenous women and girls living in communities and urban areas need to be educated when it comes to their employment opportunities and personal fulfillment so that they are better equipped to develop as individuals. They need to develop their own leadership and Indigenous women's

governance system so that they can then create their own networks and be self-sufficient in their development. Particular emphasis must be placed on First Nations and Inuit youth, as they are the future of our nations. On the other hand, the non-Indigenous population must be more educated and aware of the reality in which First Nations and Inuit live, but especially Indigenous women and girls. The barriers between two peoples must be broken down, because without this, there will be no reconciliation.

### Need for Cultural Safety

The events surrounding the tragic death of Joyce Echaquan illustrated this very well. The need for cultural safety is very much present in all services, both public and non-public, in our communities and in urban areas. No need to go into the history of the lack of trust that Indigenous people have in services provided to Indigenous people to prove the need for Indigenous-friendly services.

### Need for Accessibility and Consolidation of Services

Through our mandate of assisting Indigenous women in finding the right services for their needs, our organization has noticed that the services currently available to Indigenous women and girls are scattered and therefore more difficult to access. Indigenous women seeking a specific service often have to do extensive research in order to finally be referred to the appropriate services. In some cases, the time allotted for finding the right service is often stressful, as many only seek help when they feel a sense of urgency. In other cases, women are surprised to learn that such a service exists, from which they could have benefited for a long time. In that respect, QNW believes that the services available to Indigenous women and girls need to be more evident.

### Needs in Terms of Improving Socio-Economic Conditions

The socio-economic conditions in which Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women and girls, find themselves must be addressed on an ongoing basis and according to the needs of the various communities and the urban environment. Knowing that the issue of improving socio-economic conditions is a very complex and ongoing one, QNW proposes that the SAA focus on

two specific aspects: housing and poverty. According to QNW, focusing on these two priority actions will lead to long-term and far-reaching results. First, having a safe, permanent, not overcrowded home with proper sanitary conditions undoubtedly improves a person's quality of life. Secondly, having more financial opportunities also allows a person to take control, all in all, of his/her own means.

### Holistic Health Needs

#### *Increase in Requests for Assistance*

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been clear that all of the social and cultural issues that existed prior to March 2020 were amplified in unprecedented ways. The pandemic has heightened the urgency to act when it comes to the holistic health of Indigenous women and girls. Between March 2020 and March 2021, QNW received approximately 100 calls for assistance concerning holistic health issues. Since the beginning of the pandemic, our coordinator has received more than 900 requests. Of these, just over 300 requests (more than a third) concerned sexual assaults on Indigenous children, women and men. It is therefore essential to focus on raising awareness about sexual assault among at-risk clients, including children, women, 2ELGBTQQIA+ people and Indigenous men.

#### *Training of Workers*

It is also essential that workers who work with Indigenous clients be adequately trained to meet their needs. Those who work with Indigenous families, whether in the community or in urban areas, must be able to offer culturally appropriate services in order to adequately equip their clients when it comes to their interventions. QNW has been working for many years to train these workers, but the need is growing.

#### *Availability of Forensic Kits*

The death of Joyce Echaquan has exacerbated the problem that Indigenous people, particularly women, have no confidence in the health system. The government's refusal to adopt Joyce's Principle in full and without delay certainly does not lead to greater confidence in government services. In cases of sexual assault, Indigenous people sometimes prefer not to use police resources and services and refuse to go to a hospital because of this significant lack of trust. QNW therefore

proposes that forensic kits be made more widely available.

### *Significant Understaffing in Indigenous Health*

In general, there is a glaring lack of Indigenous health personnel, both in communities and in urban areas. There is a lack of staff in health centres and on the ground in communities and urban areas, as well as in the public system.

### Promotion of Non-Violence

#### *More Resources for Domestic Violence Cases*

Domestic and family violence is a scourge that requires immediate attention. It is a problem that will not be resolved unless concrete action is taken. QNW recognizes that the government is taking action and investing a great deal of money to remedy the problem and welcomes this. However, our organization believes that more needs to be done regarding this issue. Indigenous resources need to be developed to provide ongoing support to Indigenous women and men who are experiencing this issue, enabling them to begin their healing journey. Our organization is wondering why, in 2022, there are still no Indigenous shelters for abused women? The legacy of residential schools is pervasive and it is time for the healing process to begin.

#### *More Joint Police Patrol Teams*

The Government of Quebec has invested close to \$11.7 million over four (4) years in a joint police patrol initiative, bringing together police officers from the Sûreté du Québec and social workers. QNW applauds this initiative and believes that it should be available everywhere, whether in communities and environments served by Indigenous police services, or in urban areas. Whether for cases of domestic violence or family violence or other, joint patrols are, for our organization, the ideal solution to combine the two realities. It is important to prioritize all initiatives in the area of domestic violence, so that we stop losing our women and children to unimaginable violence. The needs are great and have been asked for many years by QNW and we expect major changes for the well-being of our families and our women.



## Justice

### *The Investigation Reports and their Recommendations*

When it comes to justice, QNW attaches great importance to the recommendations and calls to action of the various commissions, i.e. the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls - Kepek Report (NIMMIWG), the Viens Commission, the Laurent Commission, etc.

### *Barriers to Access to Justice*

Indigenous women and girls face double discrimination in accessing legal services. They face barriers because they are doubly discriminated against because they are both Indigenous women and Indigenous people.

### *Human Trafficking and Sex Trafficking of Indigenous Women*

The issue of human trafficking (including sex trafficking) has been on the QNW agenda for many years. Our women and girls are caught up in this issue and are over-represented in it.

### *Indigenous Children and Justice*

Since Indigenous women often face problems with the discriminatory justice system, they are more likely to lose custody of their children and these end up in the DPJ system. Children in the care of the DPJ system are often placed with non-Indigenous families, causing them to lose all ties to their family and culture. Moreover, having one's child taken away from one's home and placed in another culture is reminiscent of the history of residential schools. **It goes on and on.**

## Indigenous Youth

### *High Propensity for Suicide among Indigenous Youth*

Our Indigenous communities and families are facing a very significant problem in terms of the rate of suicide among young people. **There is no** need to explain the impact of suicide on a family and a community to understand that there is an urgent need to act. **Often**, the issues and lack of understanding of 2ELGBTQQIA+ people lead young people to commit suicide. To this day, there

is still a lot of prejudice against these people in communities and in urban areas. They need to be better understood and accepted.

### *Pride in Indigenous Identity*

QNW also pays particular attention to the well-being and development of Indigenous youth. Cultural identity and self-esteem are important issues in our communities and among urban youth. Without pride in their identity, Indigenous youth often feel unhappier and have lower self-esteem. It is important for Indigenous youth to take pride in their culture and language in order to develop strong self-esteem and grow into strong, proud adults. Our organization believes that it is essential for holistic wellness to have cultural reappropriation of pride. Self-esteem is the basis for young people to develop and achieve whatever they wish to do, in terms of careers, personal projects, self-fulfillment, leadership, etc.

## **QUESTION 2**

*What specific actions do you think should be put in place to better address these needs and/or issues?*

### General comments on Question 2

As a first step, QNW believes that, through the Ministry of the Executive Council, there should be an increase in funding for Indigenous organizations in terms of structure and mission. Although the SAA gives QNW a certain amount of funding related to structure, our organization operates largely through ad hoc funding programs (project programs). This makes it possible to hire resources in certain areas, without ensuring permanence and sustainability of the file. There is no doubt that, given the instability this creates, the accomplishment of our mission is affected. In our opinion, the needs and problems mentioned above could be addressed more effectively if the budget allocated to the QNW structure were larger.

As a second step, our organization believes that it would have been relevant for our women in our Nations and in urban areas to have been consulted. Although women are represented by their respective community leaders, QNW believes that it would have been ideal to hear their voices in

our consultation. As shown by the male/female ratio in elected positions on Band Councils, our concern that they may not be truly represented is justified. The consultation presented today is only representative of the employees of our organization. It is important to note that just because only employees were consulted does not mean that we consider our recommendations to be insufficient: they are representative of our mandate, of the resolutions passed by our Nations, and of QNW's past and current demands. We believe that with more time, our consultation could have been even more representative of the reality of the issues facing Indigenous women and girls and the most marginalized and discriminated against. In this way it would have been a more bottom-up and less colonial approach. Moreover, the application of the bottom-up approach concerns all our next recommendations.

Another way of approaching this comment concerns the aspect of collecting statistics, data and information. For our organization, conducting a study of this type allows us to work on precise indicators that vary over time, giving us an up-to-date portrait of the needs of Indigenous women and girls living in communities and in urban areas.

### Need for Education

In terms of specific actions regarding the need for education, there must be courses developed for Indigenous women and by Indigenous women, aimed at building their leadership and empowerment, whether at the political, community, economic level, etc. They must be able to be trained and also have the opportunity to share their traditional knowledge in order to help their fellow women, and so on. Existing models must be built on so as to avoid duplication. Women must be at the root of the creation of these training and development examples, so that the results are tangible and the impacts are in line with the reality they live. QNW should be responsible for supporting Indigenous women's networks in order to provide them with the necessary support that is truly adapted to their needs.

In terms of public awareness, QNW believes that training should also be offered by Indigenous women and expert organizations in all employment settings whether institutional or non-institutional. By creating a direct link between Indigenous women (trainers) and non-Indigenous

society, myths can be truly debunked and bridges built.

### Need for Cultural Security

This need is immediate and must be developed in partnership with Indigenous experts, Indigenous organizations and communities. In this way, not only will Indigenous people's confidence in services, especially the confidence of Indigenous women and girls', be increased, but they will also be able to participate in the co-development of culturally appropriate services.

### Need for Consolidation and Accessibility of Services

In order to make services more accessible, QNW proposes to hire human resources and obtain financial resources to promote them. It must be easier to first find the appropriate service for a person's particular needs, and then to access it as soon as possible. The communication strategy needs to be improved in order to reach as many people as possible, so that information is disseminated in all settings in which Indigenous women and girls are found. Particular attention needs to be paid to how the accessibility of services will be communicated: this needs to be adapted to Indigenous ways of communicating. A partnership must therefore be created with each community, as they all have different ways of doing things. It is important that Indigenous organizations are also involved and united, so that they can circulate the information within their respective networks and reach as many Indigenous people as possible.

### Need for Improvement of Socio-Economic Conditions

As a first step, there must be a much greater allocation of funding for housing for Indigenous people, particularly women and girls, who are at risk and vulnerable. Indigenous women must have access to affordable housing that is free from discrimination with regard to access. They and their families need to be safe at all times. They need to be in a healthy and long-term environment in order to enjoy the rights they are guaranteed.

Secondly, with the unprecedented increase in the cost of living, QNW considers it essential that action be taken to ensure financial security commensurate with the increase in the cost of food for

Indigenous women and girls. As mentioned in the previous question, our organization believes that if concrete action is taken on housing and poverty, our women will have many more opportunities for empowerment to improve all their other socio-economic conditions, and thus, their quality of life.

### Holistic Health Needs

#### *Increase in Requests for Assistance*

In order to reduce the number of requests for help, but above all to deal with the problem of sexual assault, a national and bilingual campaign to raise awareness about this scourge must be set up. Our women and children are at too great a risk of being victims and of carrying a deep trauma for the rest of their lives, in addition to the trauma of colonization. Prevention is necessary from a very young age, especially with teenagers in our secondary schools. Awareness must not only be raised about sexual assault, but the awareness campaign must be comprehensive and also address the issues of prostitution, sexual exploitation and trafficking of Indigenous minors. As mentioned in the general comments, the training and development of the awareness campaign must be co-created, in collaboration with Indigenous experts, communities and organizations. It must be done by them and for them, without interference from governments.

#### *Training of Workers*

More Indigenous trainers should offer these courses in order to train workers en masse. QNW is therefore proposing that more trainers be hired for its team so that awareness can be raised more quickly. In order to do so, we need more funding to be able to hire resources that could offer specific training on the issue of sexual assault, the youth protection system, 2ELGBTQQIA+ people, etc.

Furthermore, QNW believes that it would be appropriate for all Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers who work with Indigenous clients to be part of a single network. Regardless of the field of intervention, be it sexual assault, domestic violence, mental health, substance abuse or other, all members of the network would be connected in order to refer clients to the right services, quickly. The goal of this proposal is to create a network by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people, with

Indigenous people, to support our Indigenous families.

#### *Availability of Forensic Kits*

Our organization proposes that community health centres have forensic kits available at all times. This would facilitate the rapid delivery of services.

#### *Significant understaffing in Indigenous health*

QNW believes that there should be employment incentives employment in the health sector for Indigenous people, particularly women and girls, so that the workplace is better represented by them. In this sense, traditional practices could be **applied and could be** more relevant to the needs of Indigenous families. Our organization also believes that there should be a massive investment in increasing the number of holistic health personnel on the ground.

#### Promotion of non-violence

Whether it is the flagrant lack of non-violence resources or the joint patrols, QNW believes that the way to deal with the problem is to invest more in terms of financial and human resources. Indigenous organizations have been asking for too long that the issue of domestic violence be addressed according to their criteria and ways of doing things. Our organization is therefore asking that, on the one hand, more funds be granted to Indigenous organizations to increase the number of non-violence resources and shelters. On the other hand, we ask the government to consult both communities and cities where there are many Indigenous people, especially women and girls, to see what possibilities there are for creating joint patrols.

#### Justice

##### *The Investigation Reports and their Recommendations*

QNW therefore calls for a very thorough follow-up to the recommendations and calls for action of the various commissions. Our organization has the impression that this is often not taken seriously enough in terms of speed of action and that the actions that result do not have a genuine impact. It is therefore essential that concrete actions be taken, in consultation with the communities and

Indigenous experts and organizations, to meet their needs.

#### *Barrier to Access to Justice*

To fight against this double discrimination that Indigenous women experience in accessing justice, QNW believes that Indigenous women must receive information and legal instruction regarding their rights. It is regrettable to realize that Indigenous women and girls are questioning whether or not they have rights. This illustrates how information is not circulating and to what point they feel lost in this complex process. The justice system must include an intersectional gender-based justice approach for Indigenous women to overcome these discriminatory barriers.

#### *Human Trafficking and Sex Trafficking of Indigenous Women*

To address this issue, not only must there be the creation of a broad awareness campaign to inform our Indigenous women and girls, but there is also a need for academic research to quantify this issue. As a starting point, it would be relevant to begin with the City of Montreal, known to be a hub for trafficking of women.

#### *Indigenous Children and Justice*

The fact that Indigenous children are grossly over-represented in the child welfare system shows that it is clearly not adapted for them. As the community of Opitciwan has recently done, Indigenous communities and families must be allowed to have their own child welfare systems, according to their own values and customs. Communities must be able to care for their children in traditional and customary ways.

#### Indigenous Youth

##### *High Propensity for Suicide among Indigenous Youth*

In order to act on this issue, QNW believes that a strategy should be developed by our organization, in particular by the Youth Council, to address the issue. An awareness-raising campaign should be developed to respect and include gender. Our organization believes that this strategy should be developed by and for 2ELGBTQIA+ people. In this way, they could come together and feel safe (*safe space*). Our youth network could be in charge of this need, if funds are granted to carry out

the project. QNW is also of the opinion that the awareness campaign could be carried out with Indigenous partners, such as Wapikoni mobile, in order to be a 100% Indigenous product.

### *Pride in Indigenous Identity*

QNW encourages all government initiatives that address Indigenous youth and their development. Once again, our youth network is able to mobilize youth in all communities and urban areas to strengthen cultural belonging, pride in being Indigenous and youth leadership. In order to do this, we need funding to travel and consult with all of our Nations in this regard.

### **QUESTION 3**

*In what ways would you like to contribute to and/or be informed about the follow-up of the implementation of this action plan in the coming years?*

Overall, QNW would like not only to be informed about the follow-up on the implementation of this Action Plan, but also to be part of the development and follow-up process. Our organization has a great deal of knowledge and expertise on Indigenous women's and girls' issues - this is why we believe we can be an ally in the implementation of your Action Plan. It is time to decolonize the institutions and fully include Indigenous people themselves, communities, families, experts, Indigenous organizations and all stakeholders. There is a great deal of work to be done on the ground and QNW can act as a bridge between Indigenous women and girls and your government.

In this sense, we hope that the government will continue to be accountable for its actions regarding the implementation of this Action Plan with transparency, honesty and rigour. This is necessary to ensure that the effects are real and tangible. QNW therefore wishes to continue to collaborate with the SAA within the framework of the collaborative table, for the well-being and real improvement of the well-being of our Indigenous women and girls.



*If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Stéfanie Sirois-Gauthier, Legal and Policy Analyst at the following email address: [analyste@faq-qnw.org](mailto:analyste@faq-qnw.org).*

**Nia:wen, Migwetc, Tshinashkumitin, Wela'lin, Wli Wni, Tiawenhk, Merci, Thank you!**