

Metis Women's Council on Economic Security

2014 Report and Recommendations and Government of Alberta Response



Aboriginal Women's Initiatives and Research, Aboriginal Relations
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Advisory Framework Metis Women's Council on Economic Security

Introduction:

Talks on barriers to Aboriginal women's economic security started in August 2013 with Metis women. Two more meetings were held before the Council was formally established by Ministerial Order in December 2013 to provide advice and recommendations to the Government of Alberta and interested stakeholders on strategies to improve the economic security of Metis and Inuit women.

The Council held two meetings in 2014 and monthly conference calls on issues impacting Metis and Inuit women's economic security and established a small working group to develop an advisory framework based on the Council's findings in its first year of operation.

- April 28, 2014 – The Council held its first face-to-face meeting at the Metis Settlements General Council offices. The meeting was facilitated and included a team-building exercise, finalizing the Council's Terms of Reference and identifying priorities.
- June 2014 – The small working group distributed a draft advisory framework on the Council's priorities, barriers to success and proposed solutions and received feedback from the Council.
- September 8 and 9, 2014 – the Council heard presentations from Service Alberta on the progress of connectivity to all Metis communities and the web portal for Government of Alberta programs and services. The Aboriginal Development Branch from Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour presented on support for individual entrepreneurs and the Council provided feedback on the draft Justice Framework to Address Violence against Aboriginal Women and Girls.

Priorities

Through in-depth discussion of the myriad of issues facing Metis women in Alberta, reviews of existing literature and the collective expertise and experience, the Council identified the following three priorities to address the economic security issues of Metis women in Alberta:

- Education and Training
- Health and Wellness
- Employment and Entrepreneurship

One major theme emerged related to each of the priority areas which must be considered as part of all solutions proposed. The theme centered on "navigational" support for access to both existing and new programming. Navigation was defined as both electronic and human navigational support.

The Council is aware that Metis and Inuit women face challenges at every stage of the continuum in each of these priority areas. Rather than try to address the issues broadly, the Council proposes to target specific challenges within each priority area.

Education and Training:

For the priority of Education and Training the Council chooses to focus on the challenge of Metis and Inuit women having increased support and access to basic education; the Council coined this as *The First Step*. The challenge was chosen because there is a demonstrated recognition that Metis and Inuit

women want to advance themselves but lack awareness of existing resources, courage and support to do so. It is also recognized that many women fail to qualify for any level of post-secondary education and struggle with basic skills to prepare themselves to enter any type of formal education. *The First Step* focus can be the bridge between the desire and the skill gap to be able and ready to qualify for more advanced training and education.

Recommendation One

- (A) Develop a phased-in approach with Service Alberta to improve the existing link to Aboriginal programs and services, and review existing government assessment tools that may further refine an individual's search for appropriate supports. As part of this review, identify gaps and adjust the assessment tool as needed for the target audience. The goal is that the portal combined with the assessment tool will refer the user to appropriate resources based on their state of readiness. (Service Alberta, Corporate Website Sponsor, and steward of the infrastructure/platform and Aboriginal Affairs would work collaboratively with Cross-Ministry teams who are responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the content (ensuring links are functional and up-to-date) on the portal.
- (B) It must be recognized that there are members of the Metis community who would not have the skills, technological resources, and/or motivation to access even the most user-friendly GOA portal. For these members of our community who have otherwise been left behind, an outreach service through the Settlements, Metis Nation of Alberta or the Friendship Centres may assist these women in making the first step by helping them navigate the information on the GOA portal.

Rationale: A Government of Alberta portal to Aboriginal programs and services with an assessment tool can serve as a gathering place and provide referrals appropriate to each woman's stage of life and readiness to contribute to the economy.

There are degrees of readiness for education, mentorship and employment programs. Women with criminal records, financial barriers and mental health issues will require additional supports to develop financial acumen and build their confidence and self-esteem before they are able to access existing programs.

Service Alberta has a link to Aboriginal programs and services and it is timely to complete a content review to ensure information and services are relevant. It is still possible to build from the existing system and refine existing assessment tools that identify readiness based on some of the following criteria:

- Needs upgrading
- Needs rehabilitation, treatment, life skills training
- Needs work experience
- Needs support (start-up capital) for entrepreneurship
- Needs advanced education or professional development

Depending on the needs, the woman is referred to the appropriate resources. It must be recognized that "pan-Aboriginal" programs are not always accessible to Metis people because where there is funding through the First Nations and Inuit health departments there is most often a complete lack of funding for Metis people to attend "Aboriginal programs". In order to make "referrals to appropriate

resources" meaningful for Metis people, there must be appropriate funding for Metis people to access these resources. Mapping the links is one way of identifying gaps among existing programs and could lead to further recommendations.

The Council acknowledges this does not address the issue that many Metis and Inuit women do not have connectivity, access to technology or know how to use it. This is a gap that may be addressed in upcoming recommendations.

Government of Alberta Response:

1A) ACCEPT BUT MODIFY

Public Affairs Bureau will lead a phased-in approach to improve awareness of and access to Aboriginal programs and services under the one Government of Alberta public website (alberta.ca).

Alberta Supports has an online assessment tool that all Albertans can use to assist them in identifying their needs. The same assessment can be done over the phone or in person at one of the Alberta Supports sites. Further enhancements to the assessment tool are being developed.

Innovation and Advanced Education will support this recommendation through the Small Business Centre Website, which compiles several resources for Aboriginal entrepreneurs, including one specifically targeted to First Nations, Metis and Inuit Women.

1B) ACCEPT

Options to support this recommendation will be developed and implemented using existing resources. In the meantime, Alberta Supports *Click, Call or Come In* provides different avenues for Albertans to obtain information on social-based programs and services offered by the Government of Alberta.

Recommendation Two: Provide ongoing government funding of proven partnerships and proven Metis run programs that provide Metis and Inuit women with training, work experience and mentorship opportunities.

Rationale: An inventory of government programs and partnerships with non-profit organizations revealed a wide array of programs available to help Metis and Inuit women take that first step towards economic security, but are they achieving the desired results? Some of the programs lack a formal evaluation process, which leads to difficulty in gathering data that can support the argument for sustainable government funding.

Other programs may have an evaluation process, but they are pilot projects involving one-time funding. An opportunity to improve socio-economic outcomes for Metis and Inuit women is lost without transitioning successful pilot projects to projects that receive ongoing funding.

Alignment to Government of Alberta Priorities and Connecting the Dots: An Aboriginal Workforce Strategy

- Increasing Albertans' quality of life by becoming the leader in the areas of health care, education and skills training. (Government of Alberta News Release, Sept 16)

- Recommendation 25: The Government of Alberta explore ways to improve communications with First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal communities and organizations about provincial programs and services for Aboriginal people, and to improve awareness and linkages across ministries that serve Aboriginal people. (*Connecting the Dots*, 2010)

Government of Alberta Response:

ACCEPT

Alberta is committed to working towards improved outcomes for all Albertans, including Aboriginal people. Human Services currently supports organizations to build essential and employment skills of Aboriginal people. Ongoing funding for training and work experience is available for Metis and Inuit women through the Aboriginal Training to Employment Program. ATEP partnerships assist unemployed or marginally employed Aboriginal people gain the necessary skills training and/or work experience in projects to obtain and maintain long-term employment.

IAE places a high priority on ensuring access to quality advanced learning and training opportunities for all Albertans, including Aboriginal Albertans, and is committed to working with partner ministries and stakeholders to support educational achievement of Aboriginal students in Alberta.

IAE is working on a number of strategies to increase opportunities and participation in the apprenticeship system. For example, IAE provides funding to the Northeast Aboriginal Apprenticeship Initiative which connects Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to careers in the trades through mentorship.

IAE also supports this recommendation through other initiatives:

- The Small Business Centre website which compiles several resources for Aboriginal entrepreneurs, including one specifically targeted to First Nations, Metis and Inuit women.
- Careers: The Next Generation Aboriginal Youth Initiative, which helps motivate Aboriginal youth to enter trades and tracks and supports their progress through the system. Finally, IAE places a high priority on ensuring access to quality advanced learning and training opportunities for all Albertans, including Aboriginal Albertans, and is committed to working with partner Ministries and stakeholders to support educational achievement of our province's Aboriginal students.

Health and Wellness

Having an array of programs and services available is of little value if Metis and Inuit women do not feel worthy of participating fully in their communities and the Alberta economy. Self-worth is achieved through a healthy mind, body and spirit. Health and wellness is a process and initiatives need to address treatment and support for those who suffer mental health issues, abuse and addictions. We must build capacity within the Metis and Inuit community to provide services, improve performance and solutions must be community-based.

The *Health Status of the Metis Population of Alberta* report states the following:

In a study that conducted focus groups with Metis women, Bartlett (2004) reported that Metis women's conceptions of health and well-being could be grouped into spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual/mental dimensions of well-being; however despite these conceptions of health and wellbeing, they are not incorporated into health or social programs for Metis women (Bartlett, 2004). Additionally, it was observed that neither the presence nor the absence of disease was directly conveyed as factors related to health or well-being (Bartlett, 2004). Bartlett suggests that culturally appropriate services, programs, and research further explore the inclusion of spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual/mental dimensions of well-being, rather than the current approach of a primarily physical well-being.

Recommendation Three: Establish health navigators who can serve as guides to health and wellness supports through the Settlements, urban and rural communities and who can help bridge the cultural gap with Alberta Health Services to develop more culturally relevant health care.

Rationale: The health system is intimidating and complex for many Metis women. *Culturally Responsive Care* is gaining ground in the medical field. Rather than patient-centred care, culturally responsive care takes a world view. Questions on health beliefs, expectations of care, and cultural history are important skills in the health care provider's toolbox and the navigators can assist in the development of improved cultural competency among health care providers. Culturally appropriate services require a commitment of long-term funding to adequately measure results.

Alignment to Government of Alberta Priorities

- Increasing Albertans' quality of life by becoming the leader in the areas of health care, education and skills training. (Government of Alberta News Release, Sept 16)

Government of Alberta Response:

ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE

Different initiatives focused on navigation and cultural awareness are underway in the province with the intent to address unique challenges of Aboriginal people, including Aboriginal women and girls. Communication of the current initiatives may serve to ensure awareness, increase service update, and improve quality of services. The Councils' input and clarification are needed, especially on culturally relevant health care.

Employment and Entrepreneurship

Some Metis and Inuit women participate in the economy via the sale of their arts and crafts. Particularly in remote communities where transportation and child care are significant barriers to economic security, there is an opportunity for women in rural and urban Alberta to turn their craft into a home-based and medium sized businesses. For a variety of reasons, participation in this activity is limited. The women need to develop their knowledge of marketing their products, protecting their work, as well as how to develop and manage a small business.

Recommendation Four: Form a working group with representation from government, the Metis and Inuit community and business to develop a business plan for a Metis Women’s Social Enterprise Cooperative to promote and connect crafters and protects the authenticity and integrity of their work.

Rationale: The Council cited instances in which retailers in Alberta’s major tourist destinations are selling Aboriginal arts and crafts produced in China. A 1997 study found 81 percent of Canadian Indigenous artisans had experienced some form of misappropriation or misuse of traditional Aboriginal designs.ⁱ

A 2004 Parliament of Canada report on *Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights* notes, “For indigenous peoples such as Aboriginal Canadians, the rationale for protecting traditional knowledge centres on questions of fundamental justice and the ability to protect, preserve and control one’s cultural heritage.”ⁱⁱ There is also the concomitant right to receive a fair return on what these communities have developed: many areas of traditional knowledge have potentially lucrative applications.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Providing Metis and Inuit women with the support to protect traditional knowledge through the creation and marketing of their arts and crafts is a business opportunity that increases economic security.

Alignment to Government of Alberta Priorities

- Increasing Albertans’ quality of life by becoming the leader in the areas of health care, education and skills training. (Government of Alberta News Release, Sept 16)
- Recommendation 14: The Province continue to support and foster urban Aboriginal partnerships and initiatives that address the employment, education and economic developments priorities of urban Aboriginal communities. (Connecting the Dots, 2010)
- Recommendation 20: First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations work with all levels of government and partner organizations to create an environment for encouraging more entrepreneurial activity in Aboriginal communities across Alberta. (Connecting the Dots, 2010)
- Recommendation 26: Employment and Immigration ensure Aboriginal people in Alberta can access provincial career counseling and employment services that are available to all Albertans. (Connecting the Dots, 2010)

Government of Alberta Response:

ACCEPT

Aboriginal Relations will lead the establishment of a working group of Government, the Metis and Inuit community, and business to explore the feasibility and potential development of a business plan for a social enterprise or cooperative to promote, protect and sell authentic Indigenous arts and crafts.

Innovation and Advanced Education supports this recommendation through Business Link. Business Link has an Aboriginal Business Development Services program that could assist with the development of the Metis Women’s Social Enterprise Cooperative.

Government of Alberta – Next Steps:

The Aboriginal Women’s Economic Security Cross Ministry Committee will report semi-annually to the Councils and government on the progress made in the implementation of the accepted recommendations.

ⁱ See Craft Commercialization and Intellectual Property Rights, A Report by the Indigenous Women of the Americas, 1997, pg. 18.

ⁱⁱ The Assembly of First Nations position on traditional knowledge is contained in its Resolution No. 27/2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/prb0338-e.htm>