REVISITING THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA:

Summary of a report on progress

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SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

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The SDGs include issues that both low and high-income countries need to tackle to be sustainable and are centered on three pillars of sustainability: poverty eradication, economic growth, and environmental protection

(Gass, 2016).

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the United Nations' (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda, which set targets and deadlines in eight areas with the aim of improving the lives of the world's poorest people, came to an end. They were replaced by a new, more expansive, 15-year agenda – the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The new agenda is comprised of 17 SDGs, which together seek to eradicate poverty in all its forms and address the global challenge of sustainable development. The SDGs include issues that both low and high-income countries need to tackle to be sustainable and are centered on three pillars of sustainability: poverty eradication, economic growth, and environmental protection (Gass, 2016).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came at a potential turning point for Indigenous[1] Peoples in Canada, who have long experienced socio-economic marginalization and poorer health outcomes than non-Indigenous Canadians due to colonial government policies and church initiatives that aimed to assimilate Indigenous Peoples.[2] At the time, the political environment supported change. In particular, advances in Indigenous self-government and land claims offered the promise of "self-reliance, political and economic development, and cultural and social well-being" (Land Claims Agreements Coalition, n.d., para. 3). The 2015 election of Justin Trudeau's Liberal Government, brought about a new federal mandate to strengthen the nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership (Trudeau, 2017a). In 2016, the federal government fully endorsed, without qualifications, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)[3] and promised to meet its international obligations under the Declaration (Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2014). These events, together with

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[1] The terms 'Indigenous' or 'Indigenous Peoples' have been used throughout this paper synonymously with the term 'Aboriginal' to encompass First Nations peoples, Inuit and Métis peoples inclusively. The terms 'Aboriginal' or 'Aboriginal peoples' are used when reflected in the literature under discussion. Whenever possible, culturally specific names are used.

[2] This includes the removal of First Nations from traditional lands and placement on Indian Reserves with marginal resources; denigration of Indigenous cultures and languages; implementation of the *Indian Act* and associated loss of self-determination; implementation of the Indian residential school system, the Sixties Scoop and contemporary child welfare policies that have seen the removal of Indigenous children from their families at disproportionate rates; broken treaty promises; the failure to consult with Indigenous Peoples and address their social, economic, and health concerns in land resource development initiatives; systemic racism and discrimination against Indigenous people; among other colonial policies and practices.

[3] UNDRIP, adopted by the United Nations in 2007, reinforces fundamental rights and protections of Indigenous Peoples that were recognized by international law but often denied by states (Mitchell, 2014). Canada was one of four countries that voted against the Declaration at that time. In 2010, the Canadian government reversed its position on UNDRIP, reaffirming its commitment to strengthening relations with Indigenous Peoples of Canada. However, in 2014, as other countries moved to advance the position that states should actively engage in the implementation of UNDRIP, the Canadian government adopted a regressive position.

the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada's (2015) *Calls to Action*,[4] brought attention to the long-standing inequities and past injustices of Indigenous Peoples and avenues for political action to advance equity and improve quality of life for Indigenous Peoples in Canada, in line with reconciliation (Trudeau, 2017b; TRC, 2015). In this political climate, achieving meaningful progress on SDG targets could serve as a springboard to achieve these broad goals.

In 2018, the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health[5] released a report that assessed the state of progress on SDG targets for Indigenous Peoples (see Halseth & Odulaja, 2018). It reviewed academic and grey literature from national and international governments and non-governmental organizations. Based on the literature

review, the report identified recommendations for how to move the 2030 Agenda forward for the betterment of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Key messages included the need to alleviate poverty, as well as the need to ensure Indigenous Peoples are not excluded from the development and implementation of the SDGs, and its related targets and indicators. With five years having passed since the release of the NCCIH's first report, and the election of new minority Liberal governments in 2019 and 2021, revisiting progress on the SDG targets for Indigenous Peoples was warranted.

This report draws on research and literature published since the release of the 2018 report and assesses progress on the SDGs up to the end of 2023. It begins with a brief history of the SDGs, then introduces the reader to the Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the interrelated determinants

that impact their health and well-being. We then examine the 17 SDGs and their relation to Indigenous Peoples. Following the structure of the original report, this section is organized into five themes:

1. socio-economic marginalization (SDGs 1-2, 4, 8-11);
2. promotion of health and well-being (SDG 3);
3. equality and social inclusiveness (SDGs 5,10-11, 16);
4. the environment (SDGs 6-7, 12-14); and
5. the importance of partnerships (SDG 17).

Finally, we review progress made on our 2018 recommendations and conclude with new considerations, based on peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and expert opinions.

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[4] Stemming from the implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history, the TRC was established in 2007 to provide former Indian Residential School students, their families and communities with an opportunity to share their stories and experiences (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada [CIRNAC], 2021a) and to redress the legacy of the residential school system. The TRC travelled across Canada and heard from more than 6,500 witnesses. In June of 2015, it presented an executive summary of its findings, with 94 calls to action for all levels of government to repair the harms caused by residential schools and advance reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and Canadians. These calls span the child welfare, education, language and culture, health, and justice sectors.

[5] The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAH) was renamed the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH) in 2019.

EVOLUTION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The UN SDGs originated from international agreements that first established the MDGs in 2000. The MDGs involved a commitment by leaders from 189 countries to improve the lives of the world's poorest people, with eight goals and 18 targets set to be achieved by 2015, and 60 unique indicators to monitor progress (UN Statistics Division, n.d.). The MDGs addressed poverty, hunger, education, gender equality, child and maternal health, infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, the environment, and global partnerships. With the lifespan of the MDGs ending, a new framework was developed in 2015 to further the vision of the MDGs, as well as address new global realities, including environmental threats to the planet and the disproportionality of poverty in middle-income countries (Coonrod, 2014). As such, while the MDGs primarily called for high income countries to aide low income countries to eradicate hunger and poverty, the SDGs expanded the scope and

scale of this initiative. They did this by:

1. including four dimensions of sustainable development (i.e., social development, environmental sustainability, inclusive economic development, and peace and security);
2. providing a more comprehensive set of goals and targets within each of the focus areas;
3. expanding the scope to include both high- and low-income countries; and
4. including a framework for ensuring accountability.

In addition, the SDGs "seek to realize the human rights of all" (United Nations, 2015, p. 2).

The SDGs reflect a global shift from consumption of resources to sustainable development, emerging from concerns expressed at the Rio+20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012 (World Commission on Environment

and Development, 1987). The summit discussed poverty – identified as the greatest challenge to sustainable development – hunger, gender inequality, the socio-economic capacity of states, and environmental conservation (Canadian Council for International Cooperation, 2016; United Nations, 2012). In acknowledgement of the interrelationship between the environment and development, the Summit highlighted the need to integrate economic, social, and environmental policies to achieve sustainable development and resulted in a non-binding agreement on a set of principles known as "The Future We Want" (United Nations, 2012). The SDGs, encompassed in the 2030 Agenda, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, built on the principles agreed upon at the Rio+ Summit and renewed the international commitment to the vision of the MDGs (United Nations, 2015).

The development of the SDGs framework also addressed one of the most important shortcomings of the MDGs – its top-down approach and failure to involve Indigenous Peoples, who across the world disproportionally experience impoverished conditions. Indigenous Peoples' involvement in developing the SDGs helped to identify the issues most pressing to their health and well-being and determine relevant goals, targets, and indicators

specific to these issues (Office of the High Commission for Human Rights & Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2017). Yet, while Indigenous Peoples and civil groups were encouraged to participate in all stages of the 2030 Agenda process (Canadian Coalition for International Cooperation, 2016; Division for Social Policy and Development [DSPD], n.d.), Indigenous leaders and advocates have since spoken about the shortcomings of this participation in the development of the UN SDGs and its specific targets and indicators (Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2022a, 2022b). Nevertheless, Indigenous Peoples' sustained advocacy influenced issues related to human rights and equality, specifically equality of opportunities and outcomes (or lack thereof), and the structural factors that lead to inequality (Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2022b; DSPD, n.d.). To that end, the 2030 Agenda includes many of the pressing issues that Indigenous Peoples face both globally and in Canada, ranging from gender inequality and discrimination to poverty, inadequate housing, access to health care, clean water, traditional livelihoods, and climate change.

Endorsed by 193 countries at a United Nations' Summit held in New York in 2015, the Agenda officially came into force on

January 1, 2016. Comprised of 17 goals, the SDGs include 169 targets for achieving sustainable development and 244 indicators (including nine repeated indicators) for monitoring progress (United Nations Economic and Social Council [UNESD], 2016a). The SDGs also urgently call for improved data collection and disaggregation methods to measure overall achievement and make it easier to identify and address inequities and gaps in progress. Table 1 lists the 17 SDGs.

Many of the SDGs are interrelated, with the achievement of one goal and/or target facilitating achievement of another. For example, efforts made to end poverty and hunger (Goals 1 and 2), will improve healthy lives (Goal 3), and cannot be achieved without improving education, gender equality, and economic growth (Goals 4, 5 and 8). Likewise, steps taken to achieve some targets can be detrimental to other goals, so thoughtful work needs to occur nationally to avoid widening inequities within and among countries. Any progress towards building economic infrastructure in a country (Goals 8 and 9) could come to the detriment of the climate, ocean bodies, and biodiversity (Goals 13, 14 and 15). These connections and contradictions affect the ongoing realities Indigenous Peoples face on their lands and are discussed later in greater detail.

TABLE 1: THE 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Number	Goal
Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
Goal 10	Reduce inequality in and among countries
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13	Urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15	Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

Indigenous Peoples are a culturally diverse population living in all regions across Canada. There are three constitutionally recognized Indigenous groups: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. According to the 2021 Census, approximately 1.8 million people identified as Indigenous, accounting for 5.0% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2022a). This represents a 9.4% increase since the 2016 Census, while the non-Indigenous population grew by 5.3% over the same period. In 2021, non-status First Nations had the highest growth rate (27.2%), followed by status First Nations (9.7%), Inuit (8.5%), and Métis (6.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2022a). Among the Indigenous population, 60.2% identified as First Nations, 35.8% identified as Métis, and 4.0% identified as Inuit.[6] Approximately 41% of First Nations with registered or treaty Indian status[7] lived on a reserve in 2021. While the largest number of First Nations people reside in Ontario and British Columbia, they comprise a relatively small proportion of the population in these provinces and are more heavily concentrated in the Northwest Territories, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan (Statistics Canada, 2017b). Large proportions of the Métis population live in Ontario (21.6%), Alberta (20.4%), British Columbia (15.6%), and Manitoba (15.5%)[8], primarily in urban centres, while over two-thirds of Inuit (69%) reside in Inuit Nunangat,[9] down nearly 4% since 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

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[6] Percentages calculated by author using total population counts for each Indigenous group identified in Statistics Canada (2022a).

[7] The term 'Indian' is used by the federal government to refer to individuals who are registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada, while Treaty Indians belong to a First Nation or Indian band that has signed a treaty with the Crown (Statistics Canada, 2021d). These two groups are sometimes called 'Status' Indians to denote they have status under the Indian Act registry. Since the term 'Indian' carries a negative connotation because of its use in government policy (Office of Indigenous Initiatives, 2021), the preferred term 'First Nations' shall be used in this paper except in the context of their legal identity under the *Indian Act*.

[8] Percentages calculated by author using total population counts from Statistics Canada (2022a).

[9] Inuit Nunangat refers to the traditional homeland of the Inuit and encompasses the four regions of Nunavut, Nunatsiavut (northern Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), and Inuvialuit (Northwest Territories).

Indigenous Peoples in Canada are a relatively young population, representing a rich resource for economic development and contributions to the workforce in their respective provinces or territories. The average age for Indigenous Peoples in 2021 was 33.6 years compared to 41.8 for non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2022a). This is primarily due to a higher fertility rate and lower life expectancy of Indigenous Peoples compared to non-Indigenous Canadians (Morency et al., 2015). While seniors comprise a slightly larger proportion of the non-Indigenous population compared to children, children comprise a considerably larger proportion of the Indigenous population compared to seniors (Table 2). This population pattern (higher youth population compared to seniors) is typical of countries with emerging economies or of developing/underdeveloped countries (Boucher, 2016).

TABLE 2: PROPORTION OF POPULATION AGED 0-14 YEARS COMPARED TO 65+ (%), BY GENDER AND INDIGENOUS GROUP

	0-14 years	65+ years	Proportional difference between senior and youth population
First Nations Men/boys Women/girls	28.6% 25.6%	7.9% 9.4%	3.6 2.7
Métis Men/boys Women/girls	22.6% 21.4%	11.0% 11.2%	2.1 1.9
Inuit Men/boys Women/girls	33.4% 30.9%	5.7% 6.2%	5.9 5.0
Non-Indigenous Men/boys Women/girls	16.7% 15.9%	17.6% 19.5%	1.1 1.2

Note: Calculated by author using population data from Statistics Canada (2022a).

THE DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

Indigenous Peoples' health in Canada is shaped by several factors that influence health and well-being. These factors, often described as the "social determinants of health," are the "conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life" (World Health Organization, 2021, para. 1). The determinants of Indigenous Peoples' health are complex, interrelated, and intersect across the life course. Loppie and Wien (2022) illustrate the social determinants of health using a metaphoric tree to describe the root, core, and stem determinants. Root determinants are structural in nature and are deeply embedded in ideological and political foundations, and include colonial ideologies, governance, and Indigenous self-determination. These determinants shape all other determinants and exert the most profound influence on the health and wellness of a population, but they are not always visible.

Colonialism is considered to be the primary root determinant of ill health for Indigenous Peoples. It has resulted in a loss of land, culture, language, family values, and spirituality, which in turn contributes to despondency, loss of self-esteem, and loss of pride in cultural identity. Not simply an historic event, colonialism continues to manifest in the present day through various political and social policies and institutional racism. The 1876 *Indian Act*,[10] residential school system,[11] 1960's Scoop,[12] and the current child welfare system in which Indigenous children are drastically over-represented (Turner, 2016) are a few examples of colonial policies that have caused significant and intergenerational impacts on the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Additionally, Indigenous Peoples continue to face racism and discrimination in institutional settings, including in education, health care, child welfare, and criminal justice settings, with detrimental impacts to their health and well-being (Loppie et al., 2014). These historical and continued processes contribute to the enduring health disparities and challenges for many Indigenous people and communities.

Core determinants include systems such as education, health, justice, and social services, as well as community infrastructure, assets and capacities, environmental stewardship, and

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[10] The *Indian Act* of 1876, imposed by the Canadian government, established new systems of governance and control over First Nations peoples based on principles of paternalism and assimilation, removed First Nations peoples from their traditional lands onto small parcels of land called reserves, and redefined Indigenous identity.

[11] The Indian Residential Schools were state- and church-run schools where Indigenous children were forcefully taken from their homes, families, and communities and educated with the intention of assimilating them into Euro-Western culture (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2021).

[12] The Sixties Scoop refers to a period in Canada's history when an alarmingly disproportionate number of Indigenous children were apprehended from their families by child welfare workers, under the guise of protecting the children, and placed into non-Indigenous homes (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2019). While the term refers specifically to the 1960s when this practice was accelerated, it originated in the 1950s and Indigenous children continue to be apprehended at disproportionately high rates to the present day.

cultural resurgence. Because these determinants play a role in the allocation of resources and the engagement of individuals and communities, they represent the origins of stem determinants (Loppie & Wien, 2022). For example, underfunding of health and educational systems creates conditions of inequity in ways that affect health and are impediments to the overall well-being of Indigenous Peoples.

Stem determinants are conditions that have a direct influence on the four dimensions of Indigenous well-being (i.e., physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual). They include health behaviors, such as smoking, alcohol use, exercise, and diet; elements of the physical environment, such as housing, water supply, and geographic location; and socio-economic factors, such as employment, income, education, and food

security (Loppie & Wien, 2022). Since these types of determinants are easily observed and addressed, they are often the focus of public health interventions to improve health and well-being, leaving the core and root causes of inequity unaddressed.

The health and wellness of Indigenous people at the individual level in turn shapes the wellness of families, communities, and nations. Exposure to adverse events in the early stages of a child's development can accumulate, with negative health implications later in adulthood. Bombay and colleagues (2014) explain how collective stressors and traumatic experiences can be passed through generations, often through child abuse (e.g., emotional, physical, psychological, or sexual). Many survivors of the residential school system passed to their children

the abusive forms of discipline they experienced in these schools. These historic stressors interact with contemporary negative stressors such as poverty, food insecurity, poor housing, and/or racism, perpetuating ill health in the community and among the family. de Leeuw and colleagues (2018) argue that factors beyond the social – including spirituality, relationship to the land, geography, colonialism, history, culture, language, and knowledge systems – are especially important to Indigenous Peoples' health and well-being. Therefore, strategies to address the health inequities experienced by Indigenous Peoples must consider factors beyond the social, as well as events that occur over the life course of the population.

The SDGs thus partially embody Indigenous Peoples' holistic view of health, which encompasses the interrelatedness of all spheres of life – spiritual, physical, social, and environmental

(Fijal & Beagan, 2019).

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The UN SDGs are especially important to Indigenous Peoples, who come from all continents in the world and have a shared story of marginalization and greater health challenges compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. With their focus on improving the health of all individuals in participating states and eliminating socio-economic disparities, the SDGs represent a vision for everyone to achieve a high standard of health, irrespective of sex, age, gender, race, ethnicity, or country, while proactively curbing some of the negative impacts of globalization on the planet for future generations. The SDGs thus partially embody Indigenous Peoples' holistic view of health, which encompasses the interrelatedness of all spheres of life – spiritual, physical, social, and environmental (Fijal & Beagan, 2019).

All 17 of the SDGs are relevant to the health of Indigenous populations, though some are arguably more relevant than others. Although there are currently no standalone goals for Indigenous populations at the international level, they are referenced six times in the resolution (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues [UNPFII], 2016). Specifically, Indigenous Peoples are mentioned in Goal 2, alongside women, farmers, pastoralists, and fishers in relation to doubling agricultural productivity and the incomes of low-scale food producers. They are also mentioned in Goal 4 regarding equitable education and elimination of gender disparities. In describing the 2030 Agenda in the final resolution, Indigenous Peoples are mentioned as a vulnerable population that must be empowered (United Nations, 2015). The Agenda also identifies the need for Indigenous Peoples to work together with the government and various stakeholders to achieve its goals. To that end, the agenda encourages states to include Indigenous Peoples at national and sub-national levels in the evaluation process of all SDGs and targets.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

Anchored in a human rights-based approach to development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its espoused commitment to "leaving no one behind" reflect and reinforce the obligations of States to protect and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all. Unlike the earlier MDGs, the SDGs and their targets have been clearly linked to numerous international human rights instruments, including the UNDRIP (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2018). In a mutually reinforcing manner, these human rights instruments offer important guidance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while the SDGs have the potential to make substantial contributions to the realization of human rights (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2018).
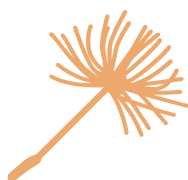
The Sustainable Development Goals and Indigenous Peoples' human rights

The realization of Indigenous human rights, especially, Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination and collective rights to land, health, education, culture, and ways of living, is integral to achieving sustainable development (Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2022a, 2022b). For example, Indigenous Peoples around the world are using ancestral and traditional knowledge to develop innovative and sustainable solutions to protect local ecosystems and improve health and well-being. However, as the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2022b) notes, these solutions require that Indigenous Peoples have the substantive freedoms and resources to make and implement their own decisions consistent with the UNDRIP.

While it is important to keep in mind that the UNDRIP only sets out "the *minimum* standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples" (United Nations, 2007, article 43, emphasis added), using the UNDRIP as a lens for interpreting and implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in an Indigenous context can significantly strengthen the SDGs as a tool for realizing the human rights of Indigenous Peoples, as a collective and as individuals (Coalition for The Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2022b). In fact, in June 2021, the Parliament of Canada adopted national legislation to implement the UNDRIP. In its *Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the legislation affirms that "implementation of the Declaration can contribute to supporting sustainable development and responding to growing concerns relating to climate change and its impacts on Indigenous peoples" (Parliament of Canada, 2021, p. 3).

The realization of Indigenous human rights, especially, Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination and collective rights to land, health, education, culture, and ways of living, is integral to achieving sustainable development

(Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2022a, 2022b).

ASSESSING PROGRESS ON THE SDGS AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

This section explores the potential impact of the SDGs to more holistically address health issues faced by Indigenous Peoples, based on their expansive reach and comprehensive targets. Due to their integrated nature, the SDGs may not be captured under one specific theme; thus, this section will discuss the goals under five broad themes:

1. socio-economic marginalization,
2. promotion of health and well-being,
3. equality and social inclusiveness,
4. the environment, and the
5. importance of partnerships.

Socio-economic marginalization

Socio-economic marginalization is the relegation of certain groups of people to the outer fringes of mainstream society, both socially and economically. This process inhibits groups from gaining equal access to resources and ignores their needs and desires, relegating them to positions of disadvantage where they have less power, voice, and participation in economic,

socio-political, and cultural life (Osei Baah et al., 2019). The SDGs that address socio-economic marginalization are Goals 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, and aspects of 10 and 11. The most relevant aspects of these goals for Indigenous Peoples are discussed below.

End poverty in all its forms everywhere (Goal 1)

In the MDGs, poverty was framed as a problem for low-income countries. The SDGs Agenda makes it increasingly clear that poverty also exists and is unacceptably high in high-income countries.

Measuring poverty in Canada

Poverty may be defined in either absolute (the accessibility of resources necessary for survival) or relative (in relation to an average standard of living within a specific region or community) terms (Lamman & Macintyre, 2016). In Canada, three types of measures are commonly used to monitor poverty: the Low-Income Measure (LIM), the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO), and/ or the Market Basket Measure

(Government of Canada, 2016; Lamman & Macintyre, 2016). Using the LIM, a household is considered to be low income if collective income is below 50% of median household incomes. This measure is often used for international comparisons since many countries report low income using this measure. Using the LICO measure, families are considered as low-income when they spend 20% more of their collective income on the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing compared to the average family. This measure is adjusted for seven family sizes and five different community sizes to capture differences in the cost of living. The Market Basket Measure determines low income based on whether a family has enough income to purchase a set of goods and services considered representative of a basic cost of living in their location of residence. In addition to these measurements, another measure occasionally used on an international scale is the Human Poverty Index. This index estimates poverty as a measure of longevity, education, and a decent standard of living rather than on income alone (Bach

& Morgan, 2020). All of these measures have unique advantages and disadvantages, creating a challenge in monitoring poverty.

While Canada does not meet the United Nations' definition of 'extreme states of poverty,' (that is living on less than $1.90 US a day; [UN Global Compact, 2021]), poverty rates nevertheless remain high among Indigenous populations. This is especially the case for those living in northern and remote regions, as well as among other vulnerable populations such as single female-led families and people with disabilities (National Advisory Council on Poverty [NACP], 2021). In 2020, 11.8% of Indigenous people (excluding on-reserve First Nations) in the provinces were living in poverty (14.1% of First Nations people living off reserve, 9.2% of Métis, and 10.2% of Inuit), compared to 7.9% of non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2022g). While the poverty rate for Indigenous Peoples declined 12% since 2015, this decline appears to be driven largely by increased government transfers and temporary pandemic-related benefits and thus does not represent actual improvements in poverty status.

The poverty rate among Indigenous Peoples in Canada shows regional and demographic variations. In 2017, 24.2% of individuals who identified as Indigenous (26.6% of First Nations, 40.4% of Inuit, and 20.4% of Métis) reported having household income that was insufficient for meeting basic household needs for transportation, housing, food, clothing, and other necessary expenses (Statistics Canada, 2021a). Poverty is especially prevalent among Indigenous households with children. Using the LIM (after tax), the national child poverty rate was 17.6% in 2016 (Beedie et al., 2019). More specifically, the child poverty rate was 47% among status First Nations (53% of on reserve and 41% of off reserve First Nations), 32% among non-status First Nations, 25% of Inuit, and 22% of Métis children compared to 12% of non-racialized and non-Indigenous children. When comparing across provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan had the highest on-reserve child poverty rates in Canada at up to 65% of First Nations children living in poverty, while Quebec had the lowest, with 29% of First Nations children living in poverty

(Beedie et al., 2019). With the exception of Inuit child poverty rates, which have remained relatively stable, Indigenous child poverty rates have shown modest improvements since 2006, especially among First Nations children living off reserve in the western provinces and Métis children (Beedie et al. 2019). Despite these improvements, if only Indigenous children were considered, Canada's child poverty rate would be among the highest of all member countries of the Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2021).

Poverty must be considered from a culturally appropriate perspective. Since poverty manifests in different realms, including income insecurity, housing and homelessness, poor health, food insecurity, poor or inadequate early childhood education, and unemployment, among others (Dignity for All, 2015), a unidimensional measure of poverty based solely on income or cost of living may not fully capture how poverty is experienced by individuals and a multidimensional measure may be required. Internationally, the Human Development Index

(HDI) has been used to assess and compare progress on three dimensions of poverty – educational attainment, income, and life expectancy. Canada has ranked well on this index globally, placing 16th out of 189 countries and territories in 2019 (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). However, Indigenous populations continue to experience discriminatory disadvantages, depriving them of equal access to opportunities related to education, employment, land, and property (UNDP, 2016b). As Cooke (2019) shows in Table 3, if the Registered First Nations population would have been ranked independently from the rest of Canada, based on HDI indicators from the 2016 Census, it would have ranked 52nd among countries with "very high" human development, compared to a ranking of 63rd in 2006, with the on-reserve population ranking worse than the off-reserve population (Cooke, 2019).

While the HDI has been used to measure well-being for Registered First Nations in Canada, anecdotal evidence suggests considerable variability in the well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, thereby indicating that the HDI does not provide a complete or accurate picture of well-being for Indigenous populations (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada [AANDC],[13] 2015a, 2015b). Canada has since developed the Community Well-being Index (CWB) to examine socio-economic well-being at the community level for Indigenous Peoples. This new variation of the HDI includes modifications to account for unreliable or unavailable population data for small size communities. The CWB includes education, employment, housing, and labour force activity dimensions. Over the period 1981-2016, the CWB score increased for First Nations, Inuit, and non-Indigenous communities.[14] The gap, however, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities has remained substantial

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[13] The AANDC department was renamed Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada in 2015.
[14] The CWB has never been calculated for Métis communities.

over this period (see Table 4) (Indigenous Services Canada [ISC], 2020a, 2020b). While the gap in the CWB scores between First Nations and non-Indigenous communities has remained relatively stable since 2006, Inuit communities have made more encouraging progress by closing the CWB gap somewhat, especially in the areas of education and income.

In 2010, a Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was introduced in the global Human Development Report, produced by the United Nations Development Programme. This index measures the intensity of poverty through three dimensions:

1. education is measured using two indicators (years of schooling, children enrolled);
2. health is measured using two indicators (nutrition, child mortality); and
3. living standards are measured using six indicators (cooking fuel, toilet, water, electricity, floor, assets) (UNDP, 2016a).

The MPI is used to calculate poverty for 107 developing countries in the 2020 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index – a framework to measure progress towards SDGs related to poverty (UNDP & OPHI, 2020). It is not, however, used in Canada due to a lack of relevant data (UNDP, 2016a).

Tackling poverty among Indigenous Peoples in Canada

SDG 1 represents a unique opportunity to address poverty within Canada. Targets set under this goal describe how Canada can end poverty by adopting national social protection systems (Target 1.3), ensuring equal rights to economic resources and control over land (Target 1.4), and building the resilience of vulnerable populations and protecting them from adverse climatic conditions (Target 1.5). However, poverty alleviation for Indigenous Peoples in Canada has and continues to face several challenges.

TABLE 3: ANTICIPATED INTERNATIONAL RANKING OF REGISTERED FIRST NATIONS POPULATION BASED ON HDI SCORES, 2006 AND 2016

	2006	2016
Registered First Nations Population On-reserve Off-reserve	63 89 47	52 78 42
Canada	n/a	12

Source: Cooke (2019).

TABLE 4: CWB SCORES FOR FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, AND NON-INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, 1981-2016

	First Nation	Inuit	Non-Indigenous
1981	45.0	46.1	64.5
1991	49.3	54.5	68.0
1996	52.7	57.5	69.9
2001	54.9	58.5	70.7
2006	55.4	58.9	73.8
2011	56.4	59.8	73.8
2016	58.4	61.3	77.5

Source: Adapted from ISC (2020a, 2020b).

Poverty alleviation for Indigenous populations remains complicated by jurisdictional issues. The federal government has jurisdiction for the provision of services (i.e. health, education, social) for status and on-reserve First Nations and Inuit living on their traditional lands, while provincial and territorial jurisdictions maintain provision over services for non-status and off-reserve Indigenous people. This has created an inequitable service provision environment, where some Indigenous people are able to access specific services while others are not, as well as ambiguity and conflict over which level of government should pay for services. While the Supreme Court of Canada's 2016 *Daniels Decision* affirmed the rights of and federal responsibility to Métis and non-status First Nations under Section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act* (1867), their eligibility for federal programs and services currently targeted at Status First Nations[15] and Inuit remains uncertain. This is evidenced by the federal government's challenge to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's decision on the applicability of Jordan's Principle to First Nations children who live off reserve in 2021 (Alhmidi,

2021), as well as by the current model of short-term and grant-based funding from multiple sources (including federal and provincial/territorial governments) that continues to pose a threat to the sustainability of urban Indigenous health services (Collier, 2020; Maxwell, 2011). However, the *Daniels Decision* did set a starting point for negotiating rights, treaties, services, and benefits between non-status First Nations and Métis Peoples and the federal government.

In the past, tackling poverty in Canada had been challenged by the absence of a national framework for alleviating policy and a national definition of poverty for measuring progress on SDG 1. This has created a tenuous policy environment for reducing and monitoring poverty across the country and among vulnerable groups (Harris, 2016). In August 2018, the federal government selected the Market Basket Measure as its first official measure of poverty and released its first poverty reduction strategy, setting targets to reduce poverty 20% by 2020 and 50% by 2030 (Government of Canada, 2018). Having this comprehensive measure provides a transparent,

measurable, and comparable national framework for poverty alleviation. The strengths of this poverty reduction strategy are threefold. First, poverty is framed as a human rights issue within the strategy. Second, the strategy takes a distinctions-based approach[16] to poverty reduction that recognizes the unique rights, interests, and circumstances of First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Finally, the strategy adopts a strengths-based approach that focuses on enhancing well-being and supporting resilience. The poverty reduction strategy was developed in consultation with academia, civil society, vulnerable populations, Indigenous Peoples and communities, and others who are impacted by the anti-poverty policy. The strategy's limitations, however, are based on its use of the Market Basket Measure to assess progress on poverty reduction, as this measure is income-based and thus may not fully capture how poverty is experienced by Indigenous Peoples across Canada.

Nevertheless, given the multi-dimensional nature of poverty, it is important to note that Canada's poverty reduction strategy is

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[15] The use of term 'Indian' is a problematic one, with negative connotations; however, the term continues to be used in a legal context in relation to status First Nations and their entitlement to benefits under the *Indian Act*. The term will thus be used here in this specific context.

[16] A distinctions-based approach is one that tailors federal policy and decision-making to the unique contexts of First Nations peoples, Inuit and Métis peoples to ensure their unique rights, interests, and circumstances are acknowledged and addressed, thus avoiding the pan-Indigenous, one-size-fits-all approach of the past (Department of Justice, 2021).

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For Indigenous Peoples, land rights enable communities to use their land in ways that protect their cultures and livelihoods, consider their values and worldviews, and guarantee their societal inclusion and cultural empowerment.

inclusive of issues on food (in) security (SDG Goal 2), housing and homelessness (Goal 11), education (Goal 4), employment (Goal 8), and ill health (Goal 3). The national framework is also complementary to the antipoverty plans that have now been implemented in every province and territory across the country.

One strategy for reducing poverty while facilitating sustainable development is through increased land rights and ownership (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019). Land ownership provides a foundation for governance, while land rights bring stability and security, enabling landowners to attract investment and socio-economic development (Fligg & Robinson, 2020). For Indigenous Peoples, land rights enable communities to use their land in ways that protect their cultures and livelihoods, consider their values and worldviews, and

guarantee their societal inclusion and cultural empowerment. In contrast, insecure land rights place Indigenous Peoples at risk of vulnerability to various methods of natural resource extraction, further displacement from the land, and ongoing structural poverty (Fuentes, 2021; McMonagle, 2021).

A study by Fligg and Robinson (2020) identified a clear association between the security of Indigenous land tenure systems and poverty (as measured by the CWB index). The trajectory in CWB scores increased from the least secure land tenure system (i.e., the *Indian Act* land management regime), to the next most secure (i.e., First Nations Land Management regime), to the most secure of the three land tenure systems (e.g., self-government land management regime). The unique land tenure system on reserve,

whereby the Crown holds title to reserve land in trust, makes it more challenging to secure market loans and mortgages, thus negatively affecting socio-economic development (Fligg & Robinson, 2020). The passage of the *First Nations Land Management Act* in 1999 enabled First Nations to opt out of the land management sections of the *Indian Act* and develop land codes and hold law-making authority with respect to the "development, conservation, protection, management, use and possession of First Nations land" and its resources (Government of Canada, 1996, p. 31). An increasing number of First Nations have chosen to move towards this land management regime, with 163 First Nations either in the process, or currently under this regime as of of July 3, 2024 (Lands Advisory Board, 2024).

Self-government became a viable option for First Nations when the federal government enacted a community-based self-government policy in 1985 (Fligg & Robinson, 2020) and an Inherent Right to Self-Government Policy in 1995 (Assembly of First Nations [AFN], 2021a). Self-government land regimes may be achieved through either comprehensive land claims negotiations [17] (modern treaties), involving First Nations, Inuit, or Métis communities, the federal government, and the relevant provincial/territorial government, or through the transition from one of the other two land management regimes (i.e., *Indian Act* land management regime, First Nations Land Management regime) to a self-governing framework. In any case, self-government land regimes involve preparation of a constitution that sets out additional rules to

the legislative agreement, with each First Nation, Inuit, or Métis community undertaking their own pathway and developing their own distinct framework (Fligg & Robinson, 2020). As of March 2024, there were 25 self-government agreements involving 43 Indigenous communities across Canada (CIRNAC, 2024).

Finally, Target 1.4 of the SDGs represents an opportunity to tackle land ownership as a source of socio-economic empowerment for Indigenous Peoples. However, the 2030 Agenda fails to specifically address Indigenous land rights and ownership of land in their respective states. Instead, the target mentions only the proportion of adult men and women with secure tenure rights to land as a proposed indicator. This failure comes as a disappointment to many Indigenous people (see

for example, AFN, 2021b). Indigenous-specific indicators on land rights and ownership of land are needed to measure progress on this target. Some examples, derived from the Multiculturalism Policy Index Project, include recognizing land rights/title and self-government rights, and upholding historic treaties and/or signing of new treaties (Davidson & Coburn, 2021). Further, while the wealth-generating capacity of land and its ability to provide food security are identified in the SDG Agenda, nine out of 10 provinces in Canada prohibit the sale of hunted meat (outside provincially-regulated and licensed facilities), thereby impacting the ability of Indigenous Peoples to earn an income from their limited landownership (British Columbia Council for International Cooperation [BCCIC], 2017). Notwithstanding, Indigenous

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[17] These are guided by the Comprehensive Land Claims Policy, implemented in 1973.

Though securing Indigenous tenure over land will be a challenging task, this target is vital to addressing the socio-economic marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and to sustaining their cultures and ways of life.

Peoples' legal rights to their lands are enshrined in the Canadian Constitution and in numerous Supreme Court resolutions to ensure this target is achieved. Though securing Indigenous tenure over land will be a challenging task, this target is vital to addressing the socio-economic marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and to sustaining their cultures and ways of life.

End hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture (Goal 2)

Goal 2 of the SDGs calls for an end to hunger and many variants of food insecurity. Food insecurity can be defined as the uncertainty and/or anxiety around household food supplies, which may result in altered eating patterns and compromises to the quality and quantity of food consumed (Chen & Che, 2001; Tarasuk et al., 2016). In extreme cases, people miss meals and go days without food.

There are four dimensions of food security/insecurity: food secure, marginal, moderate, and severe food insecurity (Tarasuk et al., 2016). The Dietitians of Canada (2016) emphasize that marginal forms of food insecurity are sensitive markers of income loss or deprivation and a prelude to more severe forms of food insecurity.

Prevalence of food insecurity among Indigenous populations

Indigenous Peoples are considered among the most food insecure populations in Canada (Tarasuk et al., 2016, 2022; Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). In 2022, 33.4% of Indigenous households [18] experienced some level of food insecurity, compared to 15.3% of non-racialized households (Li et al., 2023). The predominantly Inuit territory of Nunavut has the highest rate of food insecurity in Canada. The 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey showed that 76% of Inuit aged 15 and older living in Inuit Nunangat experienced some kind of food insecurity, with the rates highest in Nunavut (77.6%) and Nunavik (77.3%) (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami [ITK], 2021). In 2021, food insecurity was particularly prevalent among households who relied primarily

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[18] Excluding people living on reserves and other Indigenous settlements in the province, amounting to less than 2% of the population.

on pandemic-related benefits and social assistance for income, and for households led by female lone-parents (Tarasuk et al., 2022). The First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study – a cross-Canada participatory study of 92 on-reserve First Nations over the period 2008 to 2018 – found that 47.1% of households were food insecure, with food insecurity prevalence higher in the western regions of Canada compared to the Atlantic (Batal et al., 2021).

Food insecurity is not just a problem within remote communities and First Nations people living on reserves, but also affects Indigenous people living off reserve and in urban areas. The 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) showed that 38% of urban Indigenous people aged 18 and older lived in a food insecure household (43% of off-reserve First Nations, 31% of Métis, and 53% of Inuit) (Arriagada et al., 2020b). A more recent survey, conducted by Tarasuk et al. (2022), showed that in 2021, 30.7% of off-reserve Indigenous people experienced some level of food insecurity over the previous 12 months, compared to 15.9% of

Canadian households generally. This high level of food insecurity has contributed to a myriad of chronic physical and mental health conditions (Arriagada et al., 2020b; Dietitians of Canada, 2016; Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). Colonization and widespread poverty, coupled with a departure from traditional ways of procuring food, loss of cultural knowledge, and family disintegration, are at the root of food insecurity and malnutrition among Indigenous Peoples (Leblanc-Laurendeau, 2020, Richmond et al., 2020; Skukla et al., 2019; Skinner et al., 2013).

Since food insecurity and poverty tend to co-occur, poverty alleviation strategies have the potential to reduce rates of food insecurity in Canada. However, if strategies are to be effective, they must be adapted to the unique cultural, geographic, and economic context of Indigenous communities, as well as the level of provincial or territorial government involvement in poverty alleviation. They must also be based on self-determination and food sovereignty [19] (ITK, 2021).

Tackling food insecurity among Indigenous populations

Presently, Canada is well positioned to tackle food insecurity nationally and internationally because of its economic wealth, abundance of natural resources, industrial agricultural production, and expertise. However, the industrial scale of agricultural production is currently conducted with limited regard to biodiversity (Crist et al., 2017). Diets that contribute to food and nutrition security and have low environmental impacts, such as those based on Indigenous traditional harvesting practices, are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, and thus contribute to sustainability (Lindgren et al., 2018). Addressing food security with local and sustainable food production, such as cultivation, hunting, fishing, and gathering, is a key requirement for supporting sustainability at the global level (Barbeau et al., 2017), as well as a key goal of SDG Target 2.4. As such, these forms of food production should be encouraged, especially in Indigenous territories.

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[19] Food sovereignty can be defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Food Secure Canada, n.d., para. 1). It is based on the seven pillars of: 1) focuses on food for people; 2) builds knowledge and skills; 3) works with nature; 4) values food providers; 5) localizes food systems; 6) emphasizes local control; and 7) recognizes food as sacred and as a gift that cannot be squandered.

A key element of food security in Indigenous communities is access to traditional foods. First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples face considerable barriers to accessing traditional foods. Such challenges include rapid climatic change, which is creating difficulties in accessing traditional territories and reducing the transfer of cultural knowledge through the generations; widespread environmental contamination and threats from industrial development projects; as well as legislative decisions made from different levels of government, including those of neighbouring countries. These challenges are often coupled with jurisdictional failures to recognize the rights, needs, and perspectives of local communities in larger-scale governance networks that extend beyond local boundaries, preventing Indigenous communities from meaningfully participating in decision-making on issues that affect food resources in their traditional territories (Lowitt et al., 2018; 2019). There are also barriers resulting from poverty and public policy that inhibit individuals from engaging in traditional harvesting activities, benefitting financially from these activities,

and making these foods more accessible to community members who are unable to engage in these activities themselves. Collectively, these types of barriers constrain Indigenous Peoples' ability to access traditional foods. For example, findings from the First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study found that traditional food access did not meet current needs, with 47% of First Nations reporting they ran out of traditional food before they could replenish it and 77% reporting they would like to serve traditional food more often than they currently do (University of Ottawa et al., 2021).

Removing barriers to engaging in traditional harvesting practices, such as offering financial support for hunters or government support that enables the sale of harvested foods at local markets (Loukes et al., 2021; Pal et al., 2013), could make traditional foods a viable option for a larger proportion of the Indigenous population while addressing poverty (Dietitians of Canada, 2017; Klassen, 2016; Kumar et al., 2019; Native Women's Association of Canada [NWAC], 2018a; Richmond et al., 2021). While the issue of commercializing country,

or traditional, foods remains a complicated one, there appears to be support for establishing a regulatory framework that would enable the public procurement of these foods (Canadian Press, 2019, NIEDB, 2019b). Policies that improve such food production practices necessitate the recognition of land rights (SDG Target 1.4) (Dietitians of Canada, 2017; Klassen, 2016) and the full realization of and support for the right to self-determination for Indigenous peoples (SDG 17). There is also a clear need to develop indicators for measuring and regularly reporting on Indigenous Peoples' access to traditional food systems.

Food insecurity is not just a problem within remote communities and First Nations people living on reserves, but also affects Indigenous people living off reserve and in urban areas.

The concept of "food sovereignty" has emerged as a means of addressing food insecurity in Indigenous communities across Canada (Robin, 2019). This concept embodies Indigenous Peoples' ability to self-determine and control their own food systems, including markets, production modes, and environments (Ray et al., 2019). A key pillar of food security and sovereignty in many Indigenous communities is re-establishing traditional or 'country' foods (Lowitt et al., 2018). There are numerous examples of Indigenous community-based food sovereignty initiatives, spanning across diverse sectors. Some examples include:

- the Batchewana First Nation and Saugeen Ojibway Nation's fisheries governance mechanisms (Lowitt et al., 2018, 2019);

- groups of Indigenous advisors, such as BC's Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Secure Canada's Indigenous Circle, of which the latter is a leader in the fight for the redistribution of land and land reform legislation to ensure Indigenous people living in traditional territories have access to food from the land (Robin, 2019);

- food policy councils, such as the Indigenous Food Circle, which partnered with the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy to reduce food insecurity for Indigenous people in the area, increase Indigenous self-determination in food policy, and foster reconciliation with settler populations (Levkoe et al., 2019); and

- public programs that promote agricultural food production, food harvesting, and food sharing such as the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation and Nelson House Country Foods Programs (Robin, 2019; Thompson et al., 2011).

While most of these examples focus on rural and remote Indigenous populations (Robin, 2019), some also focus on urban populations (Robin, 2019). For example, the Shkagimk-Kwe Health Centre serves Indigenous people living in Sudbury, Ontario, and the surrounding area, and facilitates food sovereignty through the operation of a wild-food bank that provides the local community with access to traditional foods such as moose. The program also supports traditional subsistence activities through the organization of community and family hunts, assistance with access to basic hunting equipment, and financial support for the purchase of hunting licenses (Ray et al., 2019).

Housing and homelessness (Goal 11)

The issues of poor quality or inadequate housing and homelessness are not encompassed within any of the standalone SDGs, likely because they are considered a consequence or manifestation of poverty. Goal 11, "Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable," includes Target 11.1, which specifically mentions that there should be access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing for all people by 2030 (UNESD, 2016b). This target includes only one indicator, "the proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing."

The health and well-being of individuals can also be affected by the physical, social, and/or environmental dimensions of housing, including housing conditions, availability and affordability, number of household occupants, nature of housing tenure, proximity of housing to essential services, or household exposures to ecological contaminants (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health [NCCAH], 2017a). With its focus on the adequacy of housing in urban slums and its lone indicator, SDG Target 11.1 is insufficient for measuring progress to ensure safe and affordable housing for Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Housing conditions for Indigenous populations

While Indigenous people in Canada live in households that vary in condition, composition, and location, it is well recognized that housing is a serious issue in Indigenous communities. According to the 2021 Census, 16.4% of Indigenous people (26.2% of Inuit, 19.7% of First Nations, and 10% of Métis) lived in a dwelling that needed major repairs, compared to only 5.7% of non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2022b). This represents a slight decrease from the 2016 Census for all populations, with the exception of Inuit, and a narrowing of the gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people by 2.3% (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

In 2018, approximately 36% of Indigenous households [20] lived in rented dwellings, of which 23.8% lived in social and affordable housing compared to only 13% of non-Indigenous households (Statistics Canada, 2023c). Statistics derived from the 2018 Canadian Housing Survey highlight the greater core housing need among Indigenous people compared to non-Indigenous people, with 13.5% of Indigenous people considered to be in core housing need,[21] 13.6% living

below the adequacy standard, and 13.7% living below the suitability standard, compared to 8.8%, 6.8%, and 9.2% of non-Indigenous people, respectively (Claveau, 2020). Inuit were in the greatest core housing need, with 30% reporting they lived in inadequate housing in 2018, compared to 13.8% of First Nations people living off reserve and 11.5% of Métis (Statistics Canada, 2023c). While housing conditions tend to be better for urban Indigenous people compared to their rural and remote counterparts, in 2016 nearly half (49%) of urban Indigenous people lived in rented dwellings compared to 29% of non-Indigenous people, while 21% lived in subsidized housing (Anderson, 2019). Additionally, 11% of urban Indigenous people lived in housing that needed major repairs.

Indigenous people are also more likely than non-Indigenous people to live in overcrowded housing, defined by Statistics Canada as more than one person per room (Statistics Canada, 2017c). According to the 2021 Census, approximately 17.1% of Indigenous people (40.1% of Inuit, 21.4% of First Nations, and 7.9% of Métis) lived in housing considered not suitable for the number of people who lived there, compared to

9.4% of non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2022b). This represents a slight improvement for all Indigenous groups (Statistics Canada, 2017a), as well as a narrowing of the gap between the two groups from 9.5% in 2016 to 7.8% in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022b). The crowding situation may differ for urban populations, with fewer urban Indigenous people living in crowded dwellings (3.6%) in 2016 compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (4.8%) (Anderson, 2019). Overcrowding is associated with a myriad of poor health conditions, including the transmission of acute and chronic infectious illnesses such as influenza and tuberculosis (NCCAH, 2017a). It is also associated with poorer educational attainment, sleep deprivation, and an increased risk of child apprehension by the child welfare system (Lefebvre et al., 2017; NCCAH, 2017a).

Based on the housing component of the CWB, housing quantity improved over the period 2011 to 2016 for both First Nations and Inuit communities, narrowing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. However, housing quality has worsened, increasing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (NIEDB, 2019a).

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[20] Excluding First Nations living on reserve.

[21] Core housing need is defined by Statistics Canada (2020a) as a household whose dwelling is considered inadequate, unaffordable, or unsuitable and whose income levels prevent them from affording alternative suitable and adequate housing in their community.

Homelessness

Indigenous people disproportionately experience homelessness. Urban Indigenous people are eight times more likely to experience homelessness than non-Indigenous people and comprise a significant proportion of the homeless populations in cities (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness [COH], 2017; Thistle & Smylie, 2020). In 2018, about 12% of off-reserve First Nations people, 10% of Inuit, and 6% of Métis people responsible for housing decisions within their households reported having experienced unsheltered homelessness in the past, compared to 2% of non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2022c). Several studies on homelessness across Canada have found Indigenous people constitute anywhere from 11% to 96% of the total homeless population within major cities (Anderson & Collins, 2014; Belanger et al., 2012; Belanger et al., 2013; Bingham et al., 2019a; Currie et al., 2014; Distasio et al., 2014; Goering et al., 2014; Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness et al., 2018; Patrick, 2014), with current evidence to suggest the prevalence of Indigenous homelessness is increasing (Bingham et al., 2019b). Indigenous people are also over-represented in homeless shelters, with 31% of shelter users in Canada reporting Indigenous ancestry in 2016 [22] (Employment and Social Development Canada [ESDC], 2019).

Indigenous people may define homelessness differently than non-Indigenous people (COH, 2017). While the non-Indigenous population generally defines homelessness as a lack of "stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing" (Gaetz et al., 2012, p.1), Indigenous people understand homelessness through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews that includes loss of cultural, spiritual, emotional, and physical connection to Indigeneity and relationships (Thistle, 2017). Thistle (2017) identifies 12 dimensions that explain the experience of Indigenous homelessness: historic displacement from pre-colonial Indigenous lands; contemporary geographic separation from Indigenous lands; spiritual disconnection from Indigenous worldviews; mental disruption and imbalance; cultural disintegration and loss; overcrowding; relocation and mobility; returning home after having left; nowhere to go; escaping or evading harm; emergency crisis due to natural disasters and acts of human mischief and destruction; and climatic refugee. The causes of homelessness for Indigenous people are uniquely connected to (neo)colonial socio-structural dynamics, such as oppression, marginalization, discrimination, and racism, as well as involvement in the criminal justice and child welfare systems (Alberton et al., 2020). Given these unique dimensions of homelessness, Indigenous-specific indicators are needed when measuring efforts towards safe and affordable housing.

There are multiple pathways to becoming homeless, reflecting the complex interaction of individual and societal issues at play, including transition from reserves to urban areas, racism, discrimination, low levels of education, unemployment, mental illness, substance abuse, family dysfunction, community violence, and unemployment (Agrawal & Zoe, 2021; Alberton et al., 2020; Bingham et al., 2019b; COH, 2017). Most issues related to homelessness among Indigenous people are structural and have their roots in colonialism and historical and intergenerational transfer of trauma. Solutions to poor housing and homelessness must therefore be Indigenous-specific and tailored for diverse Indigenous groups (Patrick, 2014). These solutions need to recognize the need for cultural and social supports to be present in addition to a physical housing structure for Indigenous people who are experiencing homelessness.

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[22] In many northern communities, this proportion may be as high as 90%.

Improving access to safe and affordable housing

Addressing the housing needs of Indigenous Peoples has been a priority of the federal government, expressed in its first ever national housing strategy, released in 2017 (Government of Canada, 2017a). The strategy adopts a human-rights-based approach to addressing housing needs that is "grounded in the principles of inclusion, accountability, participation and non-discrimination," and aims to "contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and affirm the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" (p. 8). As part of this strategy, the federal government has committed to spending more than $82 billion on initiatives to improve access to affordable, suitable, and accessible housing, and to address homelessness across Canada (Government of Canada, 2024). Of this, over $6 billion has been committed to support the construction and repair of 26,784 housing units (as of December 31, 2023) for Indigenous and northern populations, with additional funds to develop distinctions-based Indigenous housing strategies (Government of Canada, 2024).

The federal government, through Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), has targeted some funding specifically to improve housing on First Nations reserves. As of December 31, 2023, $1.95 billion of a promised commitment of $3.93 billion has been invested to support nearly 5000 housing projects in 611 First Nations communities (ISC, 2023d). These projects have included the construction of 2,832 new homes and renovation of over 6000 homes, as well as 1,751 housing-related capacity development and innovation projects. Additionally, a 10-year First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy has been developed in partnership with First Nations (ISC, 2021a). This strategy outlines a path for transitioning the care, control, and management of housing to First Nations.

In 2019, the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee, consisting of representatives from the federal government, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and several Inuit land claims organizations, launched the Inuit Nunangat Housing Strategy. It outlines distinctions-based funding, federal investments, and a plan to develop long-term solutions that reflects Inuit lifestyles, traditions, and cultures (Government of Canada, 2020). A distinctions-based strategy was also launched for the Métis in 2018, with $500 million in federal funding allocated to help Métis housing authorities with new housing construction, operation and maintenance of existing housing stock, and rental subsidies to improve access to safe and affordable housing for community members (Government of Canada, 2020).

To improve housing conditions for Indigenous people living in rural, urban, and northern areas, the federal government outlined specific funding to help Indigenous and community housing providers build, repair, and protect housing affordability for Indigenous tenants. The federal government's 2020 progress report on its National Housing Strategy showed significant investment in housing initiatives in northern Canada, including $300 million to support new construction housing, delivered in the territories through bilateral agreements, and $25 million to address housing repairs to existing housing stock, with additional funds to address the unique housing needs in the Yukon ($40 million) and the Northwest Territories ($60 million) (Government of Canada, 2020). However, the Indigenous Housing Caucus of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (2020) argued that this distinctions-based Indigenous Housing Strategy did not adequately address the large service gap for the 87% of Indigenous people not living on First Nations reserve lands, but residing in urban, rural, and northern parts of Canada. In its submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the Caucus proposed a "for Indigenous, by Indigenous" (p. 2) urban, rural, and northern

Indigenous housing strategy. In response, the federal government, through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), supported Indigenous-led engagement activities in early 2023 to inform the development of an Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy (CMHC, 2024). The Strategy will be accompanied with a dedicated investment of $4 billion over seven years, starting in 2024-25, and will complement existing distinctions-based housing strategies for First Nation peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples. The Strategy outlines solutions for addressing the need for "safe, accessible, affordable, culturally appropriate, environmentally resilient, stable, adequate, and gender-responsive" housing, as well as supportive services to ensure housing outcomes are sustained (CMHC, 2024, p. 5).

As part of the National Housing Strategy, the federal government also committed to spending $2.2 billion for the *Reaching Home – Canada's Homelessness Strategy*, a 10-year plan for preventing and reducing homelessness in Canada (Government of Canada, 2020). The strategy, officially launched in 2019, provides funding to urban, Indigenous, and rural and remote communities to address homelessness. It also includes investments in distinctions-based

approaches and programming with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis partners and Indigenous governments (ESDC, 2020). The strategy requires that all people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness must have access to coordinated access sites, and that these sites use a common assessment tool for all population groups to prevent discrimination based on perceived barriers to housing or services. While communities are responsible for selecting their specific assessment tool, some common features must be incorporated, to the greatest extent possible. For instance, assessment tools must be tested, valid and appropriate; reliable; person-centered; user-friendly for both the person being assessed and the assessor; strengths-based; "Housing First" oriented; culturally and situationally sensitive to lived experiences; and transparent (ESDC, 2020).

Housing First initiatives have been pilot-tested and implemented in several urban centres across Canada to provide clients with immediate access to housing and combine housing services with supportive treatment services. Research has shown that participation in these types of initiatives leads to improved outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness, including: improved housing stability, especially for individuals

with a high need for mental health services; decreased mental health symptoms and substance use; reduced unnecessary emergency visits and hospitalizations; reduced client involvement with police and the correctional justice system; and improved quality of life (Aubry et al., 2019; Gaetz et al., 2013; Goering et al., 2014).

The federal government has been tracking progress on SDG Target 11.1 as it relates to Indigenous populations and homelessness. As of the third quarter of 2022, progress has included:

- $420 million allocated to build a minimum of 38 shelters and 50 new transitional homes for Indigenous women, children and LGBTQ2S+ [23] people escaping violence, with projects to be funded by March 31, 2026;

- $14.1 million allocated to support the construction of 12 Indigenous shelters for Indigenous women and children escaping family violence – two in the territories and 10 in First Nations communities in the provinces; and

- $627.7 million allocated to address urban Indigenous homelessness (CMHC, 2022).

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[23] The acronym LGBTQ2S+ refers to lesbian, gap, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and two-spirit. Related terms such as 2SLGBTQQIA exist and will be used interchangeably in this report.

Ensure inclusive and
equitable quality
education… and promote
sustained, inclusive and
sustainable economic
growth, full and productive
employment and decent
work for all (Goals 4 and 8)

Education is the gateway to the acquisition of skills and knowledge and is considered instrumental for alleviating poverty. Higher levels of education generally correspond with higher employment rates, more full-time work, better employment possibilities, higher incomes, and greater employment stability (OECD, 2011a, 2011b; 2020). For Indigenous Peoples in Canada, literacy and education remain key barriers in addressing employment and income inequalities compared to non-Indigenous Canadians.

Employment, education, and income characteristics of Indigenous Peoples

Over the past five years, employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have begun to close; however, progress was interrupted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Arriagada, 2020a). In 2022, 61.5% of non-Indigenous people aged 15 and over were employed, compared to 60.5% of the Indigenous population

(57.5% of First Nations and 63.5% of Métis), which represents a closing of the employment gap since 2016 (ISC, 2020c; Statistics Canada, 2022d). The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people has also closed with respect to labour force participation,[24] with 64.9% of the non-Indigenous population 15 and over participating in the labour force compared to 65.6% of the Indigenous population (63.1% of First Nations and 68.0% of Métis) (Statistics Canada, 2022d). Labour force participation is a key contributor to economic development, signifying a willingness of Indigenous people to contribute to the economy (NIEDB, 2019a). While no similar data is available for Inuit, data from the 2016 Census showed that only 49% of Inuit were employed (Statistics Canada, 2018a). The majority

(79%) of Inuit who were employed in 2017 worked in a permanent job (Statistics Canada, 2018a).

First Nations people, Inuit, and Métis people have considerably higher levels of unemployment compared to non-Indigenous people (Arriagada & Bleakney 2019; Statistics Canada, 2021b; Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, 2020a/b). Trend analysis over time reveals a generally stable or closing unemployment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations from 2018 to 2022, with the exception of the pandemic years (Table 5). While the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in similar increases in unemployment among Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, employment rates for non-Indigenous people have recovered quicker than Indigenous people (Bleakney et al., 2020).

TABLE 5: GAP IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%) BETWEEN INDIGENOUS GROUPS AND THE NON-INDIGENOUS POPULATION

Group	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Indigenous population*	4.6	4.6	4.8	4.2	2.6
First Nations*	5.9	6.3	5.7	7.0	3.7
Métis*	3.2	2.8	3.9	1.4	1.5

Source: *Calculated by author using Statistics Canada (2022d). Similar data unavailable for Inuit.

[24] The labor force participation rate is the share of the population aged 15 years and older that is either employed or unemployed and looking for work.

First Nations responses to the SDGs

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has many mandates that align with the SDGs and has undertaken numerous activities and advocacy work to address them, including SDGs 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13, and 15. This case study highlights some of the recent initiatives undertaken by the AFN to advance Canada's progress in meeting four SDGs (1, 4, 6, and 8) in relation to First Nations.

In relation to SDG 1 (reducing poverty), the AFN has provided a First Nations lens to poverty and poverty reduction in Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy, introduced in 2018. It continues to work with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to ensure the strategy meets the needs of First Nations living in poverty, especially in the areas of skills development and employment (AFN, n.d.-b.).

Improving education (SDG 4) has been an important focus of the AFN's work. The AFN has advocated for establishing a ten-year, First Nations-led and monitored, Treaty Education Implementation Plan, which will ensure access to Treaty education resources and training in each provincial and territorial school system, as well as support policy and program changes regarding First Nations education infrastructure, based on First Nations control of their education and sustainable funding (AFN, 2022). As early childhood development is seen is a key component of academic success, the AFN has also played a key role in the development of the National Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, released in 2018, and has worked with the federal government to develop an interim funding model to allocate funds to First Nations for early learning and child care programs and services.

The AFN has done much work to advance SDG 8 (increasing economic opportunities and reducing barriers to accessing capital for business development). This includes supporting the mandate of the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, a network of Indigenous financial institutions across Canada that aims to stimulate economic growth for First Nations businesses and communities. It has also advocated for legislative, policy, fiscal, and program reforms that facilitate First Nations participation in clean energy initiatives (also SDG 15); asserted First Nations jurisdiction over cannabis licensing, taxation, regulation, and revenue sharing in their territories; outlined recommendations for increasing First Nation procurement opportunities; supported First Nations authority and jurisdiction in the regulation of gaming or gambling activities; and has worked to support First Nations food security, sovereignty and economic development (AFN, 2022).

SDG 6 (water and sanitation) is another key area in which the AFN has been very active. As such, the AFN has focused attention on: broadening its National Water Strategy to support First Nations in fully and meaningfully exercising inherent and Treaty rights to water; implementing its own *Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act*; advocating for First Nations to take the lead in determining and developing priorities and strategies related to safe drinking water and wastewater legislation; and co-developing a draft framework for new legislation and a framework for a First Nations Water Commission (AFN, 2022).

TABLE 6: EMPLOYMENT RATE GAP (%) BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS, BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION, 2021

Level of education	Indigenous	First Nations	Inuit	Métis
No certificate, diploma or degree	14.1	17.4	12.1	7.2
High school diploma or equivalency	8.3	12.7	5.5	1.8
Bachelor's degree or higher	-0.1	1.7	-2.4	-2

Source: Melvin (2023).

Data from the 2021 Census highlight the association between education and employment for Indigenous Peoples. As can be seen in Table 6, employment rates were higher for First Nations people, Inuit, andMétis people with a university degree than for those with lower levels of education (Melvin, 2023).

Education is also associated with income. The higher the level of formal education, the narrower the income inequity gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. In 2021, the median employment income of First Nations people, Inuit, and Métis people with a Bachelor's degree or higher was at least $58,800, which was higher or equal to that of non-Indigenous people with a Bachelor's degree. In contrast, it was less than $15,000 for individuals having no certificate, degree, or diploma across all Indigenous populations (Statistics Canada, 2022e).

Education is key to economic empowerment. In order to improve educational attainment for Indigenous Peoples, attention must be paid to several SDG targets related to Goal 4. Target 4.1 stipulates that by 2030, all boys and girls should receive free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education. In 2021, Canada ranked fourth in the world in terms of the quality of its educational system (World Population Review, 2021) and first among OECD countries in terms of the proportion of the population with a postsecondary education (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2021; Statistics Canada & Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2020); however, its education system appears to be failing Indigenous students.

Rates of educational attainment continue to be lower for Indigenous Peoples in Canada than for their non-Indigenous counterparts, though the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people has been narrowing at the high school level (Statistics Canada, 2022f). In 2021, 73.9% of Indigenous persons aged 25-64 (82% of Métis, 78% of Indigenous people living off reserve, 55% of First Nations living on-reserve, and 50.1% of Inuit) had completed high school education compared to 89% of non-Indigenous people (Norris, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2024).

While Canada has no data that enables the tracking and comparison of Indigenous students' learning outcomes (K-12) over time (Richards & Mahboubi, 2018), large gaps in literacy, numeracy, and technology skills exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Arriagada & Hango, 2016; M. Hu et al., 2019). Attending school regularly is linked to better grades, higher literacy and numeracy rates,

While there have been promising increases in the levels of education for Indigenous Peoples, the levels have also been increasing for non-Indigenous people and the education gap between these two groups has, in fact, continued to increase

(ISC, 2020a, 2020b; Louie & Gereluk, 2021; OECD, 2020).

and a greater likelihood of graduating from high school (Education Connections, 2017). Indigenous students have higher absentee rates than non-Indigenous students, especially First Nations students attending schools on reserve, and many jurisdictions across Canada have taken measures to improve these absenteeism rates. Some promising practices include: Indigenous self-determination over education; adaptation of curriculum and pedagogy to reflect Indigenous cultures, worldviews, and values; Indigenous language programs and teaching resources;

focus on personal wellness, employment preparation and life skills in education; positive school culture that emphasizes respect and relationships; parental involvement and family friendly environments; academic and career development and supports; and extensive cross-cultural and English as a second language training for non-Indigenous educators (Education Connections, 2017).

The lower high school graduation rates among Indigenous students are, in turn, reflected in lower levels of postsecondary education compared to non-Indigenous

people. Data from the 2021 Census show that 45.4% of Indigenous people (53.1% of Métis, 41.3% of First Nations, and 27.4% of Inuit), had attained a post-secondary degree or diploma compared to 66.3% of the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2024). The gap in postsecondary education[25] between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples is directly attributable to the significant gap in university attainment (AFN, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2018b). In 2021, 9.5% of the non-Indigenous population (8.2% of First Nations, 4.5% of Inuit, and 11.6% of Métis)

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[25] Postsecondary education includes all levels of university education, as well as college and vocational training.

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Addressing barriers that affect learning for Indigenous people

Goal 4 overlooks the many barriers that affect learning for Indigenous people that are rooted in historic and contemporary impacts of colonialism on educational attainment. Indigenous students face numerous barriers to equitable education, operating from the individual to broader societal and environmental levels. These include:

- racism, discrimination, and the maintenance of stereotypes within the learning environment;

- inequitable control over the education system by the dominant culture;

- language and literacy barriers;

- curriculum and pedagogy that are culturally unrelated to Indigenous students' needs;

- socio-economic marginalization, including poverty, unemployment, poor quality or overcrowded housing, and malnutrition;

- geography;

- the impacts of a legacy of intergenerational trauma, including poor self-esteem, self-concept and self-worth on academic achievement; and

- inequitable funding for education (NCCAH, 2017b).

had attained at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 21.9% of non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2024). This gap needs to be overcome in order to address income inequalities between the two populations.

While there have been promising increases in the levels of education for Indigenous Peoples, the levels have also been increasing for non-Indigenous people and the education gap between these two groups has, in fact, continued to increase (ISC, 2020a, 2020b; Louie & Gereluk, 2021; OECD, 2020). The shift to online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to further negatively impact Indigenous student success (Cherubini, 2020), as many

remote and isolated First Nations and Inuit communities faced barriers in accessing online and virtual learning platforms during the pandemic. Barriers included inadequate bandwidth to support multiple network demands, online resources not accessible in Indigenous languages, unstable internet structure, as well as a lack of cell phones and internet-ready devices, making it difficult to access external educational resources (Mashford-Pringle et al., 2021). In this new educational environment, improving education outcomes will require substantial investments to ensure Indigenous communities have equitable access to internet connectivity, something that is currently lacking in remote and isolated communities.

In rural and remote Indigenous communities, limited school and educational opportunities force many students to leave the support of their families and communities for further education, something that may be particularly traumatizing for younger students. In 2018, approximately 54% of First Nations students were forced to leave their communities to obtain a high school diploma (AFN, 2020). The lack of schools on reserve can lead to many First Nation students "falling through the cracks" (Garrow, 2017, p. 2). Multi-faceted and multi-sectoral strategies are needed to address the barriers Indigenous children face in obtaining a quality education, including those that address inequities in the socio-economic determinants of health such as poverty, housing, economic development, and others.

Federally supported Indigenous educational systems have also had a long history of chronic underfunding (Drummond & Kachuck Rosenbluth, 2013).

Funding shortfalls in First Nations education were estimated to be between $336 million to $665 million in 2016 and expected to grow to between $376 to $744 million by 2021 (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2016). This funding shortfall is one of the most critical factors preventing the delivery of high-quality education services for First Nations living on reserve.

There is a need to pay specific attention to Target 4.4, which emphasizes the importance of upgrading school infrastructure and is a major source of concern on First Nations reserves and in Inuit Nunangat. For example, in 2020, only 18% of First Nations schools received a 'good' operations and maintenance rating, while 57% received a 'fair' rating and 13% received a 'poor' rating (AFN, 2020). The quality of schools was particularly poor in rural areas. Approximately 28% of First Nations schools were overcrowded and in need of additions, while 9% required immediate replacement based on school age or poor condition

(AFN, 2020). Many First Nations schools also lacked access to clean drinking water or additional amenities considered essential for supporting student learning in the modern era, including fully equipped playing or indoor fields, kitchens, science labs, libraries, and access to technology (Chiefs Assembly on Education, 2012). These inequalities highlight the need for additional Indigenous-specific indicators to measure progress on Target 4.1 in relation to the availability of schools and the adequacy of school resources to ensure equitable access to quality education.

The federal government has made some progress in addressing the above concerns. It announced billions of dollars of investment in its annual budgets since 2016 to improve First Nations elementary and secondary education on-reserve (ISC, 2021b). Budget 2021 proposed an additional investment of $1.2 billion over five years and $181.8 million ongoing to support the education of First Nations children (ISC, 2021c). It also announced an

In rural and remote Indigenous communities, limited school and educational opportunities force many students to leave the support of their families and communities for further education, something that may be particularly traumatizing for younger students.

investment of $969.4 million over five years for the construction, repair, and maintenance of First Nations education facilities, which has supported 203 school infrastructure projects as of March 31, 2019 (ISC, 2021d). In its 2019 budget, the federal government also invested $824 million over 10 years to support Indigenous post-secondary education attainment (Government of Canada, 2019a).

In April 2019, Indigenous Services Canada implemented a new formula-based, regional funding model for elementary and secondary education, co-developed with the Assembly of First Nations. The model aims to ensure First Nation schools are supported by predictable base funding that is comparable to students enrolled in provincial education systems (ISC, 2019). The new comparability approach, called the Interim Funding Approach (IFA), includes annual updates to account for student population growth and other education cost changes, as well as collaborative work with First Nations to support the creation of new Treaty-based, regional, and/or local education agreements with First Nations that respond to their education goals and priorities and account for factors such as remoteness, school size, language, and socio-economic conditions. Additional funding commitments include $1500 per student annually to support language and culture programming, new resources to support full-time kindergarten in every First Nations school, and more predictable special education funding, with less onerous application processes.

Nevertheless, the new approach has been criticized by some First Nations. Some First Nations leaders have called the approach "inconsistent with the treaty right to education," arguing they were not consulted in the process and had concerns regarding potential losses in school budgets (Ball, 2021, n.p.). The Yellowhead Institute critiqued the IFA, finding the new approach would increase transparency and address funding inequities to some degree but arguing it would not translate to the "substantial increases needed to make transformational change" (White-Eye, 2019, para. 8). A robust system of governance supports for First Nation schools is recommended to make long-lasting impacts to student outcomes, such as improved research and data systems, Traditional Knowledge Keepers as teachers, First Nation education learning resource development, and highly contextualized teacher training/certification centres (White-Eye, 2019). In their critique, the Yellowhead Institute expressed concerns that First Nations control would be undermined by the direct funding link to provincial education decisions, which makes their educational systems vulnerable to changing policies and fluctuating funding levels brought about by changing provincial governments. Nevertheless, federal policy and funding changes to First Nations education should help to close the education gap for First Nations students.

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A robust system of governance supports for First Nation schools is recommended to make long-lasting impacts to student outcomes, such as improved research and data systems, Traditional Knowledge Keepers as teachers, First Nation education learning resource development, and highly contextualized teacher training/certification centres

(White-Eye, 2019).

A focus on early childhood education

As improving educational attainment must begin in early childhood to enhance children's future physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development, and maximize their future well-being, Target 4.2 – ensuring all boys and girls have access to quality early childhood development (ECD) programs – is especially important for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children. Federal programs like Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) provide community-based and culturally focused education that is centred on fostering the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical growth of young Indigenous children (both on and off reserve), while also supporting parents and guardians as their primary teachers. AHS programs function through the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities program (AHSUNC) for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children living off-reserve, and the Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve program (AHSOR) for First Nations children living on reserve. AHS and other Indigenous-specific ECD programs result in positive outcomes for children in terms of school readiness and improved academic performance, and also help children to become more resilient and higher-achieving students (Office of Audit and Evaluation [OAE], 2017; Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2017a, 2017b). They also show benefits for parents/caregivers and community members in terms of improved health status, increased uptake of health promoting behaviours, improved parenting skills and knowledge, greater commitments to culture and linguistic revitalization, as well as increased community-wide self-esteem and confidence (Mashford-Pringle, 2012; OAE, 2017).

Access to AHS programs is, however, inequitable across Canada and has not kept up with demand (OAE, 2017, 2022). There are considerable gaps in services for children living in small communities that lack the resources and capacity to initiate or maintain early childhood education programs, as well as in urban centres. In 2017, there were 88 AHS programs predominantly for First Nations children living off reserve (serving approximately 55% of off-reserve First Nations children); 57 programs for Métis children (serving approximately 19% of Métis children); and 31 programs for Inuit children (serving approximately 21% of Inuit children) (PHAC, 2017c). An evaluation of the AHSUNC program revealed that despite being among the fastest growing populations, only a "very small fraction" of Indigenous children living in urban centres and off-reserve are served by AHS programs (OAE, 2022). This gap was attributed to static funding, barriers faced by Indigenous grassroots organizations in navigating the complex funding agreements with PHAC, and the lack of funding available to support the needs of urban and off-reserve Indigenous children.

While no similar data are available for First Nations children living on reserve, CBC News reported that in 2018, the program only served between 18-19% of eligible First Nations children living on-reserve across the country, with no services available for children with special needs (Barrera, 2018). General barriers to accessing the AHS program included long wait lists, population growth, and stagnant funding, while lack of trained staff, proper equipment, and accessibility prevented young children with special needs and their families from receiving the program's services. The presence of Indigenous-specific indicators on the availability of quality ECD education programs and the proportion of Indigenous students participating in such programs is needed to effectively address Target 4.2.

In 2017, the federal government undertook an engagement process with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis organizations and co-developed the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Framework. This distinctions-based framework sets out visions, principles, and a path forward for children to have the opportunity to experience high-quality, culturally rooted, early learning and child care programming, based on the specific priorities of First Nations

Métis responses to the SDGs

The Métis National Council (MNC) works with federal and provincial governments and other organizations to advance Métis priorities in a number of key policy areas that align with the SDGs, including climate change (SDG 13), biological conservation (SDG 15), good health (SDG 3), inequality (SDG 10), education (SDG 4), and ending poverty (SDG 1). This section highlights some of the work the MNC has recently undertaken to advance the SDGs for Métis in Canada in relation to SDGs 3, 4, and 13.

The MNC's recent activities in relation to SDG 4 (education) focus on early learning and childcare (ELCC). Along with other national Indigenous representative organizations, the MNC worked with the federal government to co-develop the Indigenous ELCC Framework (MNC, 2023a). The framework reflects the unique cultures, aspirations and needs of Indigenous children across Canada, and includes a Métis Nation framework for building an ELCC system anchored in Métis culture that supports the early learning and development needs of Métis children and families specifically. These efforts led to the signing of the Métis Nation Early Learning and Child Care Accord in 2019, a bilateral agreement signed with the Government of Canada that stipulates how the two parties will support national coordination, research, and policy development in ELCC (ESDC, 2022). The Accord outlines a model of flexible funding that allows for the creation of culturally relevant ELCC and holds the parties accountable to co-develop a Métis Nation ELCC Accountability and Results Framework.

The MNC is addressing the health and wellness of Métis people and communities (SDG 3) through evidence- and culture-based approaches (MNC, 2023b). For example, the Métis Nation Health Committee provides advice to MNC leadership and focuses on the social determinants of health, data strategies, and health research. The committee aims to identify the health and well-being needs and priorities of the Métis population; participates in health policy discussions at the national level as it pertains to the Métis Nation; and works in collaboration with federal and provincial governments and other partners to improve the health and well-being of Métis people (MNC, 2023b). The MNC has also advocated for improved quantity and quality of Métis-specific research, reports, and recommendations and for systems-level change to ensure culturally safe healthcare for all Métis.

In terms of SDG 13 (climate change), in 2020 the MNC commissioned a climate change and health vulnerability assessment report to enhance understanding of the risks climate change poses to Métis health (JF Consulting, 2020). The report assesses the degree of risk that Métis citizens in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and North West Ontario face from forest fires, flooding, landslides, extreme heat and drought, glacial retreat, changing sea levels, ocean acidification and hypoxia, vector-borne diseases, and invasive spaces. The report highlights the paucity of data to assist in conducting climate change risk and vulnerability assessments for Métis populations, particularly information on health status and health determinants, information on harvesting and other cultural activities, resiliency factors in the face of climate change, and direct impacts of climate change on Métis populations specifically. The MNC has also been working with other Indigenous representative organizations to develop a Climate Leadership Program that focuses on how Indigenous Peoples relate to climate change and are impacted by it (MNC, n.d.). The program, offered as an online/distance training program, will cover the basics of climate science and climate action, and explores Indigenous perspectives on these topics, the root causes of climate change, connections between climate change and health of Indigenous communities, peoples, and Nations, and how Indigenous Peoples can fight climate change at multiple scales.

Decolonized education is seen as being critical for restoring a strong sense of identity and pride in Indigenous peoples, which is central to academic success

(Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003).

peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples (ESDC, 2021). The framework sets a vision for "happy and safe Indigenous children and families, strong cultural identity, and a comprehensive and coordinated system that is anchored in self-determination, centred on children and grounded in culture," (ESDC, 2021, n.p.). The federal government committed $1.7 billion over a 10-year period (2018-2028) to strengthen early learning and childcare programs and services for Indigenous children and their families. At the time of writing, work was underway to identify relevant and useful indicators of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children's early learning and child care and their congruency with the ELCC framework (see for example, Greenwood et al., 2020).

Promoting sustainable development through decolonized education

Finally, Target 4.7 aims to ensure that learners acquire the knowledge and skills they need to promote sustainable development, including, among other things, appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development. Indigenous Peoples have a deep connection to the land and have used its resources sustainably for centuries, thus have much knowledge to offer on sustainable development. At present, many mainstream education systems in Canada do not fully appreciate cultural diversity or the potential contributions that Indigenous cultures can make to sustainable development. Eurocentric knowledge (reading and mathematics), pedagogy, and assessment processes are primarily emphasized, with Indigenous knowledges and methods of

learning sparsely reflected in provincial/territorial education systems (Carr-Stewart, 2019, Morcome, 2017; Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020).

Indigenous scholars have long recognized that mainstream (provincial/territorial) education systems must be completely transformed and decolonized (Battiste, 2004, 2013, 2020; Carr-Stewart, 2019; Stavrou & Miller, 2017; Poitras Pratt et al., 2018; Wildcat et al., 2014). Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and pedagogies must be fully integrated into educational curricula, with Indigenous knowledge validated as a full and equal partner rather than being treated as an 'add on' or 'other' way of knowing (Battiste, 2002; Munroe et al., 2013; Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2007). Decolonized education is seen as being critical for restoring a

strong sense of identity and pride in Indigenous Peoples, which is central to academic success (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). As the CCL put it succinctly, "if decades of Aboriginal poverty and marginalization are to be reversed, there is an urgent need to re-examine what is understood as First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning and how it is measured and monitored" (2007, p. 3).

In 2015, the TRC made several Calls to Action to advance reconciliation in the area of education, including actions that support Indigenous students' success and foster an understanding and respect for Indigenous Peoples and their experiences and perspectives among all students (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). To this

end, some progress has been made in the decolonization of education systems and advancement of reconciliation across Canada. Provincial and territorial governments have been conducting whole system reviews and making reforms to their education systems, as well as taking various actions to prioritize minority language revitalization, review and revise standardized assessments, revise curricula to incorporate Indigenous perspectives and reconciliation education [26] across all grade levels, promote greater Indigenous self-determination in education, and develop policies and practices to raise Indigenous student graduate rates (EdCan Network, 2019). Wotherspoon and Milne (2020) undertook an analysis of how reconciliation is articulated in

educational policies and practices across Canada. They found that all jurisdictions across Canada have expressed commitments and initiated actions related to reconciliation since the release of the TRC report. Efforts included:

- development of policy statements,

- identification of goals and commitments to improve education and cultural recognition,

- creation of specific branches or units dedicated to Indigenous education within education ministries,

- creation of a senior-level position in government dedicated to Indigenous content in education,

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[26] Reconciliation in the area of education focuses on anti-racist curricula that is intended to improve students' attitudes toward other groups of people.

- development of comprehensive policy frameworks,

- development of action frameworks for measuring progress towards achievement of Indigenous education priorities,

- incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into curricula, and

- incorporation of Indigenous content and culturally appropriate curricula, pedagogical approaches and student assessment methods.

The federal government has also taken actions to give Indigenous Peoples greater self-determination in education, enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability. With this, the federal government has signed education self-government agreements with 35 Indigenous communities. This includes one that established the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, representing 12 of the 13 Mi'kmaq communities in Mi'kma'ki (Nova Scotia), and the Anishinabek Nation Education Agreement, creating the Anishinabek Education System that serves 23 Anishinabek First Nations in Ontario (CIRNAC, 2020). Indicators from Nova Scotia highlight the positive student outcomes that have resulted from transferring control over education to Mi'kmaq communities, including: high school graduation rates of nearly 94%, increased numeracy and

literacy rates, the education of the majority (83%) of students in Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey schools, and an average attendance rate of 91% (Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, 2021). Other education self-determination agreements also exist, including an Education Governance and Delegation Agreement with First Nations leadership in Manitoba that created the Manitoba First Nations School System – a culturally relevant, high-quality, education system for Manitoba First Nations school children, designed and led by First Nations (Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre Inc., 2019); five-year British Columbia Tripartite Education Agreements, benefitting First Nations students on and off reserve; and the Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission Agreement in Alberta (Government of Canada, 2019b). Several provinces/territories have launched Indigenous education frameworks, the most recent of which is Manitoba's *Mamahtawisiwin: The Wonder we are Born With* framework – which aims to support the holistic achievement of Indigenous students by "supporting Manitoba teachers in incorporating Indigenous pedgagogy, languages and culture into their teaching and practices" (Macintosh, 2022; para. 5; see also Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022). Recently, British Columbia (BC) also established a First Nations Education

Authority to assist self-governing First Nations in developing the capacity to provide education on their lands (Government of BC, 2022). These types of agreements aim to respond to First Nations educational priorities and approaches, as well as ensure students receive a high quality and culturally appropriate education.

Despite this progress, Wotherspoon and Milne (2020) found tremendous variation in the depth and intensity of actions taken by provincial and territorial governments across Canada and the continued subordination to or embedding of Indigenous perspectives and worldviews into Western assumptions, norms, and standards. They found that only seven (now eight with Manitoba's framework above) of the 13 jurisdictions had comprehensive Indigenous education frameworks and only two (now three) stood out from the others with respect to the integration of Indigenous worldviews and perspectives into the education system (Saskatchewan, Nunavut, and now Manitoba). Most of the policy frameworks continued to position Indigenous Peoples as the 'other' and identified general outcomes or individualized performance targets based on standardized test score results and gaps in academic achievement, contrasting with the more holistic Indigenous conceptions of learning and success (Wotherspoon & Milne,

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2020). While some of these frameworks contributed to improvements in academic success among Indigenous students, Wotherspoon and Milne (2020) concluded that to achieve real progress in Indigenous education, all levels of the education system must put words into action. They argued that the decolonization of schools cannot be achieved solely by integrating Indigenous content but requires examination of "power relationships that determine questions (and answers) regarding school structures, policy and decision-making, curriculum and pedagogy, teacher-student-community relationships, [and] access to and assessment of student success" (McGregor, 2013, as cited in Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020, p. 17).

Promotion of health and well-being

Poverty (and its consequences of food insecurity, poor housing, and homelessness) is linked to poor health outcomes; however, people can still perceive their health as good despite adverse socio-economic conditions. This is because health is more than the absence of physical symptoms; it also includes mental and social well-being. For Indigenous Peoples, health is often perceived holistically (as a balance of the mind, body, and spirit), and is relational, based on an individual's connections with his/her family, community, and the environment (Gall et al., 2021; de Leeuw et al., 2018; Hatala et al., 2020). In Canada,

health status is often measured in terms of "perceived health." This subjective measure captures not only physical illness, but also reflects well-being across dimensions of health relevant to the individual (Statistics Canada, 2019a). To that end, data from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey revealed that 47.7% of Indigenous people (45.5% of First Nations people living off reserve, 50.2% of Métis, and 42.2% of Inuit) perceived they had very good or excellent health (Statistics Canada, 2020b), a slight decrease since 2014 (Statistics Canada, 2016). In contrast, 61.0% of Canadians aged 12 and older perceived their health to be very good or excellent (Statistics Canada, 2021c).

Health perception is also influenced by any illnesses individuals may have, their socio-economic circumstances, and resiliency to cope (Goudanas Mavroudhis, 2018; Kezer & Cemalcilar, 2020). As a result of the intergenerational impacts of colonial policies such as the residential school system and adverse social and judicial policies (e.g., the policies that result in the disproportionate apprehension of Indigenous children into child welfare systems and Indigenous individuals into correctional systems), many First Nations people, Inuit, and Métis people in Canada face adverse socio-economic conditions and a myriad of physical and mental health issues. While colonialism is not the sole cause of disease and illness among Indigenous

Peoples, it contributes greatly to disproportionately high levels of some illnesses through the creation of social, environmental, and economic conditions that can increase the prevalence of risk factors for specific illnesses. These illnesses include cardiovascular diseases (hypertension, heart diseases, and stroke), diabetes and obesity, infectious diseases (e.g., HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases), respiratory diseases, mental health issues, and cancers (see for example, Andermann, 2017; Diffey et al., 2019; Hajizadeh et al., 2018; Kim, 2019; PHAC, 2018). These conditions also contribute to poorer birth outcomes, injuries, and fatalities among Indigenous populations, discussed further below.

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (Goal 3)

The third SDG and its targets highlight the need to reduce maternal and child mortality (Targets 3.1 & 3.2), communicable and non-communicable diseases (Targets 3.3 & 3.4), preventable injuries from accidents (Targets 3.6), and the abuse of substances such as alcohol, narcotic drugs, and tobacco (Targets 3.5). There are striking disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples on these health outcomes.
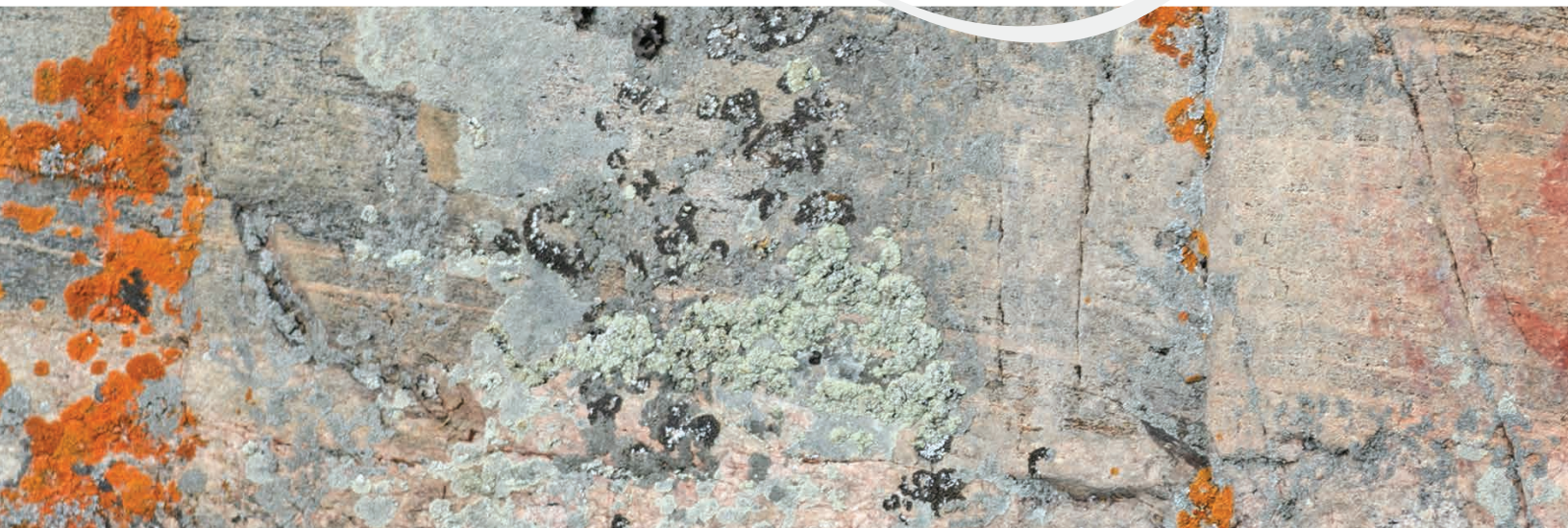
Reduce maternal and child mortality

While major gaps exist in the quality and coverage of data on birth outcomes for Indigenous populations, the existing data indicate Indigenous populations have poorer birth outcomes compared to non-Indigenous people, including higher stillbirth, macrosomia, and neonatal, perinatal, post-neonatal, and infant mortality rates (Chen et al., 2019; Gilbert et al., 2015; ISC, 2020c; Shapiro et al., 2018, 2021; Sheppard et al., 2017; Smylie et al., 2010; Xiao et al., 2016). The data indicate that on-reserve First Nations, off-reserve status First Nations, and Inuit have rates of infant mortality and neonatal mortality ranging from 1.4 to 4 times higher than non-Indigenous infants, while the difference for post-neonatal mortality is even greater. Disparities for the post-neonatal period are due to factors such as congenital conditions, sudden infant death syndrome, infections, and other infant health issues that have been disproportionately experienced by Indigenous Peoples (Sheppard et al., 2017; Smylie et al., 2010). Data from British Columbia indicate that while the infant mortality rate for status First Nations has shown some improvement over the period from 1993-2015, this improvement has not been consistently sustained and the gap between status First Nations and other residents of BC continues to persist (Office of the Provincial Health Officer [OPHO] & FNHA, 2018).

One of the challenges in reducing adverse birth outcomes for Indigenous populations is the shortage of maternal health personnel for Indigenous women living in isolated communities, preventing access to the same level of maternity care as Indigenous women living in urban areas (Amundsen & Kent-Wilkinson, 2020; Jameson, 2021; Cidro et al., 2020; Cidro & Sinclair, 2021; Lalonde et al., 2009). This issue is a complex one, but in part reflects colonial health policies aimed at assimilation and replacement of Indigenous approaches to birthing and Indigenous midwifery[27] with Western health systems, as well as

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[27] Midwifery is a common practice among Indigenous populations. It declined in the mid-1800s due to the development of the obstetrics profession and shifting attitudes about the safety of midwife-attended births (Lalonde et al., 2009). The loss of midwives coupled with the closure or reduction of maternity care services in rural hospitals across Canada since 2000 have resulted in a loss of local maternity services in many Indigenous communities (Kornelson et al., 2010).
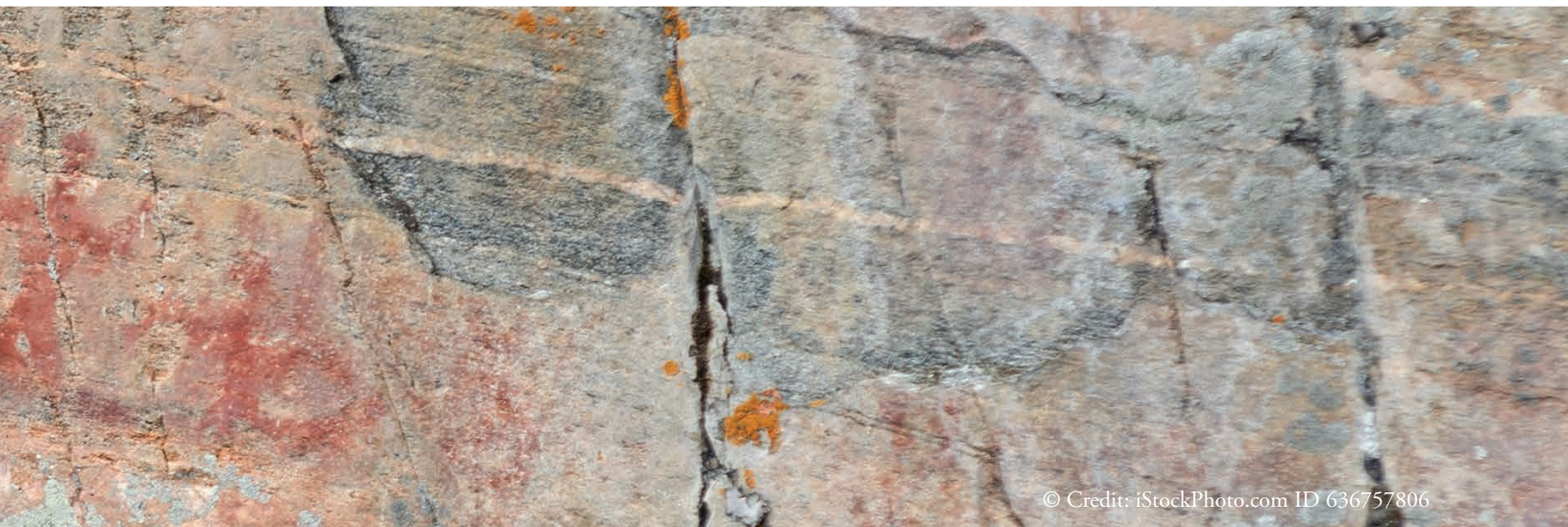
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underfunding of health services in Indigenous communities (Cidro et al., 2020; Hillier et al., 2020; Kolahdooz et al., 2016; Lavoie et al., 2010a, 2010b). Routine prenatal care has the potential to lead to better health outcomes for mothers and babies. It has been shown to reduce the risk of perinatal illness, disability, and death by addressing the behavioural factors that contribute to poorer pregnancy and birth outcomes, such as smoking, alcohol and substance misuse, unhealthy diets, and lack of physical activity (Gibberd et al., 2019; Jameson, 2021). Barriers that limit access to prenatal care may include: geography, transportation costs, appointment accessibility, lack of investment in community-based perinatal care and health service infrastructure, lack of childcare for other children, fear of child protection services, previous negative experiences with healthcare providers, mistrust of mainstream healthcare systems, as well as an absence of culturally safe and appropriate care (Burns et al., 2019; COVID-19 Prenatal Care Task Force; Forbes, 2019; Jameson, 2021; Wall-Wieler et al., 2019).

Pregnant Indigenous women in rural and remote communities are routinely evacuated to urban centres at 36 weeks' gestation, separating mothers from their families and social support networks and situating them in unfamiliar environments (Cidro & Sinclair, 2021; Lawford et al., 2019). This practice is perceived as a safety measure but can cause emotional distress for mothers due to financial burden, family disruption, cultural discontinuity, and/or exclusion of community participation in childbirth. Mandatory evacuation also impacts individual and collective well-being and leads to low utilization of health services and loss of women's self-determination (Silver et al., 2021).

There has been a movement to return maternal care services back to Indigenous communities by (re)establishing Indigenous community-led models of maternity care in locations across Canada, including midwifery and doulas (Hayward & Cidro, 2021; Landsberg, 2021; Smylie & Phillips-Beck, 2019). Indigenizing birthing services and practices is considered a human right under the UNDRIP (Hayward & Cidro, 2021). These models facilitate a healthier physical pregnancy, birth, and postpartum (Cidro & Sinclair, 2021; Ireland et al., 2019). While evidence of the benefits of these models for Indigenous communities is limited, existing evaluations have shown promising results, including high rates of participation in prenatal care, the majority of births occurring safely within local communities, and lower rates of some adverse birth outcomes (Van Wagner et al., 2007; Van Wagner et al., 2012; Wiscombe, 2020).

Research findings suggest that additional Indigenous-specific and northern indicators may be warranted for SDG Targets 3.1 and 3.2 on the need to reduce maternal and child mortality, including indicators focused on the social determinants of health, health care responsiveness, and accessibility (Rich et al., 2020). This may include indicators on: Indigenous midwifery legislation and licensing through professional associations, social supports, experiences of racism in healthcare systems, maternal substance use, maternal education, the presence or absence of intimate partner violence, the number of communities with birthing centres, the proportion of Indigenous women who are able to access prenatal care and give birth locally, and the number of Indigenous midwives, both in communities and in non-Indigenous health care settings. There is also a need for tailored Indigenous community-led maternity services and programs that honor Indigenous practices and beliefs and are located where Indigenous women live to help close the gaps in prenatal care. These may include prenatal education, assessments, and in-home visits (Burns et al., 2019; Cardinal, 2017; Wiscombe, 2020). While there have been calls for implementing a comprehensive Indigenous birthing initiative, there has been a lack of follow-up with action and leadership to move this initiative forward (Cardinal, 2017).

To address Targets 3.1 and 3.2, issues related to data collection and quality will need to be addressed. These include: the use of unlinked [28] birth data, potential misclassification and under-reporting of adverse outcomes, lack of Indigenous identifiers in data collection, absence of birth outcomes data for Métis, limited monitoring of trends in all regions across Canada, and the need for Indigenous data governance (Chen et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2016; COVID-19 Prenatal Care Task Force, 2021; Sheppard et al., 2017, Trevethan, 2019). To date, progress made with respect to data collection and data quality includes:

1. the establishment of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC),[29] and with it the development of ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP®) principles [30] and the First Nations Data Governance Strategy; [31]
2. the signing of a Tripartite Data Quality and Sharing Agreement [32] and initiation of a BC First Nations' Data Governance Initiative in British Columbia;
3. the establishment of the Unama'ki Client Registry [33] in Nova Scotia; and
4. regional data governance initiatives in Manitoba, Alberta, the Yukon, Quebec, Labrador, and Saskatchewan (Nickerson, 2017; Yao, n.d.).

Nevertheless, much work needs to be done to ensure that information about Indigenous identity is consistently collected in surveillance activities; that up-to-date, disaggregated data for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations are provided across age ranges, gender, and geographic locations; and that culturally appropriate indicators are developed to capture the realities and strengths of Indigenous populations (Greenwood et al., 2020).

Reduce illnesses and injuries

Targets 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5 also have considerable bearing on Indigenous populations who experience disproportionately high rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases, as well as injuries. Current data reveal higher rates of HIV/AIDS, respiratory infections (such as bronchiolitis, pneumonia and tuberculosis, influenzas), hepatitis C, and other communicable diseases, among Indigenous Peoples (Basnayake et al., 2017; Bruce et al., 2019; Eton et al., 2017; Haddad et al., 2018; Long et al., 2019; McLeod et al., 2019; Mitchell & Peiris,

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[28] Linked data refers to the interlinking of multiple sets of data and is considered useful as it enables the sharing and connecting of data, creating context for interpreting findings, and drawing of relationships between resources. Unlinked data thus examines only one set of data in isolation.

[29] The FNIGC is an independent non-profit organization that provides quality information that contributes to improving the health and well-being of First Nations people in Canada (FNIGC, 2021a). The Centre asserts data sovereignty and supports the development of information governance and management at the community level through regional and national partnerships.

[30] These principles have become the de facto standard for conducting research with First Nations and has expanded to encompass the governance of First Nations information. The principles reflect First Nation commitments to use and share information in a way that provides community benefits while minimizing harm, as well as expresses First Nation jurisdiction over that information (FNIGC, 2014, p. 4).

[31] Funded by the federal government in Budget 2018, this strategy aims to build capacity in data governance and information for First Nations in Canada through the establishment of a network of fully functioning, interconnected data and statistical service centres (FNIGC, 2021b).

[32] Signed by the provincial and federal governments with First Nations leadership in British Columbia in 2010, this agreement ensures that federally and provincially held information on First Nations is shared.

[33] The registry, created by the Tui'kn Partnership with the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness and Health Canada, is a community-owned, locally designed, registry of the Unama'ki population that allows for linkages between community and provincial data to better inform decision-making practices (Tui'kn Partnership, n.d.).

2017; Mounchili et al., 2022; Park et al., 2015; PHAC, 2015; Skinner et al., 2018). Indigenous populations, especially First Nations, experience disproportionately high rates of certain cancers and diabetes mellitus (Jaffer et al., 2021; Jamal et al., 2021; Mazereeuw et al., 2018; McGahan et al., 2017; Prince et al., 2018; Voaklander et al., 2020). Rates of cardiovascular disease are also rising for Indigenous Peoples and nearing or surpassing those of non-Indigenous people, particularly for Indigenous women (X. Hu et al., 2019; Jaffer et al., 2021; Norris et al., 2020; Prince et al., 2018).

Indigenous people in Canada are significantly more likely to die prematurely than non-Indigenous people. Injuries are leading causes of preventable death for Indigenous people, especially those living in northern and geographically remote areas. This includes deaths resulting from suicide, motor vehicle accidents, drowning, fire, and homicide, though some of these deaths may also be attributed to

alcohol and drug use (Kumar & Tjepkema, 2019; Monchalin et al., 2019; Pollock et al., 2018a/b; Subedi et al., 2019). Indigenous people are also dying prematurely from cancer, diseases of the circulatory system, diabetes mellitus, infectious diseases like tuberculosis, and other respiratory illnesses (Park et al., 2015). The increased risk of premature mortality in this population is due, in part, to the legacy of intergenerational trauma on mental health; a greater prevalence of high-risk health behaviours such as smoking, alcohol abuse, obesity, and poor diet; socio-economic marginalization, as well as residence in rural and remote locations (Brussoni et al., 2018; George et al., 2013; Park et al., 2015). Again, the role of poverty in poorer health outcomes must be acknowledged, as poverty is associated with food insecurity, low levels of education, low levels of health literacy, and other adverse social conditions that increase the risk of preventable communicable and non-communicable diseases (NCCIH, 2020). Access barriers

to health services can also contribute to premature mortality in Indigenous populations, including poor access to primary care physicians and specialists, healthcare staff shortages, lack of screening services, differential treatment, differences in language and culture between care providers and patients, and a lack of cultural safety (Chu et al., 2019; Huot et al., 2019; Lavoie et al., 2021; Nelson & Wilson, 2018; Withrow et al., 2016). These types of barriers can result in delayed treatment, later stage diagnosis, and poorer quality of care.

There is a need to address the social origins of many of these illnesses, as well as enhance immunization and surveillance strategies (Andermann, 2017; Dehghani et al., 2018; Kovesi, 2012; Young et al., 2020). At present, Target 3.3 lacks indicators related to rates of immunization, as well as on the incidence of water-borne diseases and other respiratory illnesses beyond tuberculosis. Target 3.4 likewise lacks the breadth of indicators needed to capture the scope of and monitor

progress on reducing premature mortality in Indigenous populations in Canada. While a selected number of indicators on mortality are included, such as for cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and suicide, indicators attributed to other causes of premature mortality for Indigenous people, such as fires or drownings (deaths resulting from road traffic accidents are covered under Target 3.6), alcohol and drug addictions, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and other mental illnesses, are lacking. The "absence of 'relevant, consistent, and inclusive Indigenous identifiers in core population health data sources' in general," continues to make routine surveillance of disease burden among Indigenous populations highly challenging (Sarfati et al., 2018, p. 336). Further, while Target 3.5 calls for strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, many Indigenous people are not entitled to the same level of substance abuse treatment services available to status First Nations living on-reserve. For

example, only status First Nations living on-reserve and Inuit with addiction challenges have access to the federally funded National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse and the National Youth Solvent Abuse programs.

The current SDGs framework also makes no mention of the importance and use of traditional healing and medicines for Indigenous Peoples. The rights of Indigenous Peoples to their traditional medicines and health practices are affirmed in Article 24 of the UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007). Traditional healing and medicines are understood as "a set of health practices that incorporate Indigenous understandings of health and wellness," and can include use of "ceremonies, plant-based medicines, counselling and other hands-on techniques" to promote an individual's holistic health and well-being (Redvers et al., 2019, p. 1). Traditional approaches to wellness have been found to be particularly effective for improving patient health outcomes in the areas of mental health (Marsh et al., 2015; Rowan

et al., 2014) and health promotion generally (Prescott & Logan, 2019). While many Indigenous people have expressed a desire for greater access to traditional healing and medicines, there are barriers to accessing these services, including biases towards Western medicine over traditional healing approaches; lack of policies, staff, and resources to support traditional approaches; systemic racism in healthcare systems; and limited knowledge of traditional practices among non-Indigenous healthcare providers (Monchalin et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020; Redvers & Blondin, 2020; Redvers et al., 2019). To achieve health equity with non-Indigenous people, Indigenous patients must have the option to access traditional healing practices in a culturally safe environment (Redvers et al., 2019) Additionally, relevant indicators must be developed to measure progress in this area, including number of Indigenous healers, visits, and supportive policies; availability of traditional medicine content in health care provider curricula; and patient satisfaction with traditional healing options.
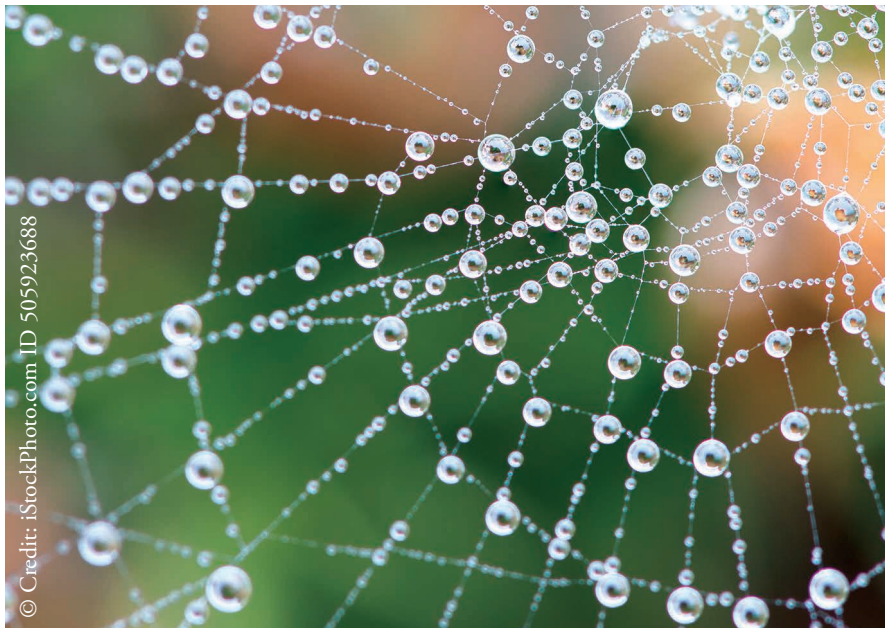
Considerable progress has been made across Canada since the TRC's Calls to Action were released in 2015 in relation to cultural safety training and the recruitment and retention of Indigenous peoples in the healthcare workforce.

Strengthen the health workforce

Goal 3 also highlights the need for improved health financing, training, and retention of health care workers (Target 3.c). Recruitment and retention of health care workers remains an ongoing challenge in rural and remote Indigenous communities, especially where there is a need for culturally safe and relevant care that reflects Indigenous Peoples' beliefs, cultural practices, and languages (Bourassa, 2018; Kulig et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2021; Richardson & Murphy, 2018). In addition to limited access to comprehensive and specialized care in rural and remote regions, many Indigenous people have also experienced negative and harmful encounters within the healthcare system, including racism, discrimination, language difficulties, intimidation, harassment, and judgmental

behaviours (Allan & Smylie, 2015; Browne et al., 2021; Goodman et al., 2017). As a result, they may fear or distrust Western healthcare professionals and be reluctant to seek care for their health issues. Two common strategies for eliminating barriers to safe care are the implementation of cultural safety training for non-Indigenous health practitioners (with accountability measures) and strategies to improve Indigenous people's participation in the healthcare workforce (NCCIH, 2022a). As such, there is a need to provide increased financial and other supports for Indigenous students entering health professional training programs, address issues of pay inequity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous healthcare providers, and address systemic racism through policy reforms and initiatives focused on

educating the workforce and promoting cultural safety (Anderson & Lavallee, 2007; Brockie et al., 2023; Guerra & Kurtz, 2017). These strategies need to be supported with Indigenous-specific indicators to track progress, including the proportion of non-Indigenous health practitioners who have taken cultural safety training and the proportion of the health workforce that is Indigenous. There is also a need to assess whether these types of initiatives are successful in eliminating barriers to safe care.

Considerable progress has been made across Canada since the TRC's Calls to Action were released in 2015 in relation to cultural safety training and the recruitment and retention of Indigenous people in the healthcare workforce. Universities and colleges across the country

have integrated cultural safety curricula into health sciences, nursing, and medical degree programs. While results are mixed, some evaluations suggest this training has contributed to significant and relevant learning outcomes, including enhanced student knowledge of Indigenous health and traditional knowledges, greater acceptance of traditional healing practices and their contribution to health and well-being, increased student confidence, decreased negative attitudes, recognition of power structures, and increased cultural humility [34] (Kurtz et al., 2018; Rand et al., 2019). An environmental scan of cultural safety initiatives across Canada reveals that every province and territory across Canada has implemented some form of cultural safety training for nurses and other healthcare professionals; however, not all of these training programs adequately capture the key elements of cultural safety, such as power structures and cultural humility (NCCIH, 2022a). Furthermore, physicians and affiliated health professionals are often not required to take cultural safety training, and the training is often not tailored to unique Indigenous contexts. The scan also reveals that several provinces and territories have developed system-wide cultural safety policies, which include institutional support at all levels to ensure cultural safety initiatives and mechanisms are implemented and their impact evaluated. On a national level, Indigenous Services Canada has implemented a Nursing Retention and Recruitment Strategy to assist national recruitment efforts, and mandated Indigenous relationship and cultural safety courses for nurses working on reserve (ISC, 2020d). Indigenous recruitment and retention strategies for the health workforce have also been developed in some provinces and regions (NCCIH, 2022a). Despite these positive developments, instances of Indigenous racism continue to arise (see, for example, Page, 2021; Turpel-Lafond, 2020), highlighting that much work still needs to be done, requiring commitments be made at all levels of the healthcare system, to address and eliminate systemic racism.

Equality and social inclusiveness

Social inclusion may be defined as "the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights" (Department of Economic and Social Affairs [DESA], 2016, p. 17). Social inclusion encompasses social, cultural, and political dimensions. It is not solely about having sufficient material resources (i.e., income, employment, land, housing) and access to services (i.e., education and healthcare) to promote well-being, but also involves participating in community life, having agency and control over important decisions, exercising one's voice, having one's rights and dignity respected and protected, and not feeling isolated or inferior (DESA, 2016).

Indigenous populations face persistent barriers to equity and social inclusion due to the legacy of colonialism, as well as ongoing racism and discrimination experienced at individual and societal levels and embedded at systemic and structural

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[34] While cultural humility has been defined in a variety of ways, it entails a willingness to learn from others and places greater emphasis on a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-awareness to understand personal and systemic conditioned biases over the achievement of cultural knowledge and awareness. It involves promoting interpersonal sensitivity and openness, addressing power imbalances, and building relationships based on respect and mutual trust (First Nations Health Authority [FNHA] et al., 2021; Stubbe, 2020; Surfrin, 2019).

levels. This section focuses on Goals 5 (gender equality), 10 (within and among countries), and 16 (peaceful societies), and looks at how they pertain to Indigenous Peoples. Of note, Goal 4 (equality and social inclusiveness in education) is discussed in an earlier section and any Indigenous-specific context for Goal 11 (inclusive cities) is captured collectively under other themes.

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5)

In the SDG agenda, Goal 5 calls for an end to discrimination against women and girls (Target 5.1), elimination of all forms of gender-based violence (Target 5.2), equal and full participation in political, economic, and public spheres of the country (Target 5.5), and the adoption of policies and legislation that promote gender equality and empowerment for women and girls (Target 5.c). This goal is especially pertinent to Indigenous women, who are among the most marginalized populations in Canada and face multiple forms of discrimination.

Ending discrimination

Historically, Indigenous women played vital roles in Indigenous communities. Before colonization, they carried out not only domestic activities, but were often heads of households, played an essential economic role, were crucial in determining leadership, were involved in conflict resolution and decision-making, and made vital contributions to the physical and cultural survival of their communities (Akbari, 2021; Green, J., 2017; Hanrahan, 2021; Jamieson, 1986, as cited in Carter, 1996). Women were revered and respected in many Indigenous communities as givers of life, family anchors, caretakers of the environment, warriors, and keepers of cultural knowledge (Akbari, 2021; Altamirano-Jiménez & Kermoal, 2016; Dennis & McLafferty Bell, 2020; Monchalin, 2016; Robinson, 2019). However, colonialism has transformed how Indigenous women are regarded in society and the social, political, and economic realities of their lives, which in turn has impacted their physical, emotional, and mental health.

Following European settlement in what we now call North America, colonial authorities imposed a new social structure that eroded Indigenous cultural values and replaced matrilineal and egalitarian systems with a patriarchal one, subjecting Indigenous women under male dominance (Akbari,

2021; Hanrahan, 2021). The tools of colonialization, including the *Indian Act*, residential schooling, the Sixties Scoop, forced sterilizations, and other assimilationist policies, sought to marginalize Indigenous women (Saramo, 2016). As a result of this new structure, not only were Indigenous people considered an inferior class of people within Canadian society, but Indigenous women were considered an inferior gender within that inferior class (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 1999).

The adoption of the *Indian Act* reinforced gender-based discrimination and inequality for more than a century (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW], 2015). It defined 'status Indian' based on paternal lineage, denied women the right to possess land and marital property, removed First Nation status from women who married non-First Nations men, and prevented their status from being passed onto their children – although this was not the case for First Nations men who married non-First Nations women (Akbari, 2021; ISC, 2021e). Since eligibility for social benefits and certain rights is attached to First Nations status, these discriminatory provisions effectively denied First Nations women who married non-First Nations men access to on-reserve

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housing, support for education, access to social and health services, as well as the right to vote in band council elections, reside on reserve lands, and harvest land (CEDAW, 2015).

While amendments have been made to the *Indian Act* since its inception to address some of these discriminatory provisions,[35] remaining fragments of the sex-based hierarchy embedded in the Act remained in place until just recently (McIvor et al., 2019). On August 15, 2019, the federal government moved to eliminate the remaining sex-based inequity from the registration provisions of the *Indian Act* by bringing into force the final provisions of "Bill S-3 Eliminating known sex-based inequities in registration" (ISC, 2021e). The Bill removed the 1951 cut-off for entitlement to Indian status for descendants of women impacted by sex-based discrimination, extending this date back to 1869. While this action is a step in the right direction, it alone will not address the harms that sex-based discrimination has inflicted on Indigenous women.

Continued structural discrimination and reduced access to resources results in persistent marginalization for Indigenous Peoples, especially for Indigenous women (Ray, 2019). Indigenous women are more likely to live in poverty than other Canadians. In 2021, 28.9% of Indigenous women living on-reserve and 11.5% of Indigenous women living off reserve lived in poverty, compared to 11.4% of Canadian women (Lim & Ding, 2023). Indigenous women are over-represented among homeless

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[35] For more information about the history of related *Indian Act* amendments, please refer to AFN (n.d.-a).

women and are more likely than men to provide care for children or other family members while experiencing core housing need (Bingham et al., 2019a). Because Indigenous women face higher levels of poverty, reduced income due to family caregiving commitments, and barriers to accessing traditional (country) foods, they may compromise their own food security to ensure that other members of the household are food secure (Domingo et al., 2020; Subnath, 2017). In 2017, 41% of urban Indigenous women aged 18 and older lived in a food insecure household compared to 34% of Indigenous men (Arriagada et al., 2020b). Data from the First Nations Food, Nutrition, and Environment Study revealed that more female survey respondents (50%) had their households classified as food insecure compared to male respondents (41.4%) (Batal et al., 2021). Likewise, some data also suggest that Inuit women may be more vulnerable to food insecurity than their male counterparts (Arriagada, 2017).

As a result of socio-economic marginalization, Indigenous women are more likely to experience poorer physical and mental health outcomes compared to non-Indigenous women. This includes psychological distress, lifetime suicidal ideation (Hajizadeh et al., 2021), suicide (Kumar & Tjepkema, 2019), postpartum depression (Daoud et al., 2019), diabetes (Crowshoe

et al., 2018, Walker et al., 2020), HIV/AIDS (Koehn et al., 2021), certain cancers (Mazereeuw et al., 2018), and gender-based violence (Arriagada, 2016). Efforts to improve the collection and analysis of disaggregated data that reflect the unique experiences of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis women from Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women are critical to address the socio-economic marginalization of Indigenous women (NWAC, 2018b).

Eliminating all forms of gender-based violence

Indigenous status and gender intersect with systems of oppression, such as sexism, patriarchalism, and colonialism, to perpetuate sociocultural inequalities that resonate in women's lives through intergenerational trauma and violence, harming Indigenous women's health and well-being (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2017; Gagnon-Dufresne et al., 2021). Evidence presented at the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) makes clear the strong link between the numerous human rights and Indigenous rights abuses committed and condoned by the Canadian state against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people and gender-based violence. These actions deny individuals their "safety, security, and human dignity," fostering an environment that normalizes

violence (NIMMIWG, 2019a, p. 167). Racism further creates harmful stereotypes that suggest Indigenous women are primitive and promiscuous beings, leading to false perceptions of them as worthlessness and free to be exploited (Akbari, 2021). This is evidenced in the disproportionately high rates of Indigenous women who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) (Heidinger, 2021); murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls (NIMMIWG, 2019b), sexually exploited Indigenous women (Ray, 2019; Rottenberg, 2016), and incarcerated Indigenous women (CEDAW, 2015).

In 2018, 61% of Indigenous women reported experiencing some form of IPV in their lifetime since age 15, compared to 44% of non-Indigenous women (Heidinger, 2021). Indigenous women were almost twice as likely to experience physical abuse compared to non-Indigenous women (42% vs. 22%), with Métis women experiencing the highest rates (46%), followed by First Nations (42%) and Inuit (34%) women (Heidinger, 2021, 2022). Between 1980 and 2014, 16% of police-reported female homicide victims were Indigenous women (Research and Statistics Division, 2017). While the number of murdered non-Indigenous women has declined since 1991, no similar decline has been seen for murdered Indigenous women (Research and Statistics

Division, 2017). Studies also show that First Nations women and youth represent between 70% and 90% of the visible sex trade in areas where the Indigenous population is less than 10%, with many falling victim to modern human trafficking (Singh, 2018; Sweet, 2014). Because of the high degree of exposure to violence, lateral violence[36] has become the most common form of violence against Indigenous women (Royal Canadian Mounted Police [RCMP], 2015). Extractive industries like mining, logging, and fossil fuels, which bring an influx of transient male workers into rural areas on the periphery of Indigenous communities, are among the main perpetuating factors of violence, trafficking, and murder against Indigenous women (MacMaster & Seck, 2020; Ray, 2019; Sethi, 2009).

Violence against Indigenous women has been identified as a national human rights crisis (Amnesty International, 2014). However, addressing this issue is complex and challenging. Shelters are often lacking for women escaping violence. There were 93 shelters serving Indigenous victims of abuse in 2020/2021, of which 54% were located in rural areas, 39% were located on reserves, and 80% were located in First Nations, Inuit, or Métis communities (Maxwell, 2022). This represents

an increase of 8 shelters since 2017/2018 (Maxwell, 2020). On July 23, 2021, the Government of Canada announced a commitment of $420 million over five years to support the construction of at least 38 Indigenous-led emergency shelters and 50 transition homes across Canada (ISC, 2021f); however, much more work needs to be done to address the various barriers that Indigenous women face in accessing appropriate supports and services.

Formidable barriers can prevent Indigenous women from reporting violence and leaving abusive situations. These include:

1. past discriminatory experiences with police and judicial systems that have tarnished the trust of many Indigenous women and cause some apprehension to rely on these services for the safety of their children;
2. the normalization of violence in many Indigenous communities that has led to an ethos of condoning violence against women;
3. the fear of having children apprehended by child welfare authorities in family violence situations; and
4. financial insecurity (Fiolet et al., 2021; Gagnon-Dufresne et al., 2021; Kubik & Bourassa, 2021).

Shame and concerns over confidentiality and protection of privacy in tight-knit communities may also present significant barriers to accessing support services (Fiolet et al., 2021).

Indigenous women are over incarcerated at increasingly alarming rates, surpassing those of Indigenous men and comprising half of the population of incarcerated women in 2022 (George et al., 2020; Ray, 2019; Smith, 2020; Zinger, 2023). Their crimes are most often the result of poverty-related breaches of probation, failures to appear in court, unpaid fines, and theft (Anderson et al., 2022; Smith, 2020). The incarceration of Indigenous women leads to a vicious cycle of colonialism and oppression, as their children are likely to be placed in long-term foster care, thereby also perpetuating the cycle of trauma (Smith, 2020).

Indigenous women entering hospitals to give birth or for other surgical reasons are also disproportionally subject to forced or coerced sterilization without their informed consent (Boyer & Bartlett, 2017; First Nations of Quebec and Labrador health and Social Services Commission, 2022). In the 1900s,

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[36] Lateral violence is a learned behaviour where people abuse their own people in ways similar to how they have been abused in the past.

eugenics[37] was seen globally as a way of addressing social problems that were considered traits of marginalized populations, leading to some provinces (Alberta and British Columbia) officially adopting sterilization policies (Akbari, 2021; Leason, 2021). While intended for all races, Indigenous women were primarily affected by these policies, with sterilizations commonly performed in residential schools, penal institutions, and mental asylums. In 2017 and 2018, more than 100 Indigenous women came forward with claims of forced sterilization procedures in Saskatoon (Akbari, 2021). These cases typically involved women feeling pressured or coerced to sign consent papers for sterilization procedures while in labour or immediately after giving birth, being told the procedure was reversible if they changed their mind, or having denied consent to sterilization yet having it done against their will. The practice of forced sterilization represents a form of cultural and biological genocide (Akbari,

2021) and is rooted in power and inequity. As such, addressing this issue will require the creation of culturally safe and appropriate sexual and reproductive health care services and supports, and ongoing reconciliation efforts to address Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in health care, based on respect for Indigenous rights (Leason, 2021).

In its Calls for Justice, the NIMMIWG (2019a) provides wide-ranging recommendations for individuals and institutions at all levels to address the various pathways by which colonial violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people persist across generations. These recommendations focus on addressing historical, multigenerational, and intergenerational trauma and social and economic marginalization, as well as overcoming the lack of institutional will and encouraging agency and expertise of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

Full and equitable participation in political, economic, and public spheres

Women's rights are codified as human rights under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and recognized in the UNDRIP. Despite this, Indigenous women continue to "face systemic violations on their human rights and are excluded or discriminated against in their own communities and society at large" (Prior & Heinämäki, 2017, p. 194). For example, there are concerns surrounding violations of the rights of women and girls in male dominated natural resource sectors, including accusations and lawsuits over gender bias, workplace violence against Indigenous women and girls, uneven benefits for women in Impact and Benefit Agreements (IBAs),[38] and workplace health and safety issues affecting women (Koutouki et al., 2018; MacMaster & Seck, 2020).

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[37] Eugenics is the practice of trying to improve "the human species by selectively mating people with specific desirable hereditary traits" … [and] 'breeding out' disease, disabilities and so-called undesirable characteristics from the human population" (History.com editors, 2019, para. 1). The practice encouraged people considered of 'superior' stock to reproduce while discouraging the reproduction of those considered inferior or fell outside the social norm.

[38] IBAs are negotiated agreements between Indigenous communities and resource development proponents that aim to address an adverse effects of development activities on Indigenous communities and ensure these communities benefit from those activities on their traditional territories.

Indigenous women are inadequately represented in decision-making spaces at the corporate, national, and international levels, with harmful impacts to their interests and well-being (Koutouki et al., 2018). In late 2020, the Prosperity Project (2021) conducted a survey of 48 of Canada's largest organizations and found that only 4% had one or more women who identified as Indigenous in an executive officer role in 2020, up from 2% in the previous year, and 9% had one or more Indigenous women who were poised to progress to an executive role, up from 6% in the previous year. While the *Canada Business Corporations Act* was amended in 2018 to, among other things, enhance shareholder democracy and participation, diversity, and women's representation on corporate boards and in management positions, the pace of progress towards gender and racial equity at the leadership level has been glacial (Prosperity Project, 2021). MacMaster and Seck (2020) note that the amendments do not go far enough in achieving parity, in part because they do not set normative standards or quotas for women's representation on boards, as well as lack compliance measures.

Lower levels of income and a lack of resources, combined with systems of oppression, may restrict Indigenous women's bargaining power and participation in decision-making processes, including in resource development impact assessments and climate change mitigation and adaptation processes, among others (Kennedy Dalseg et al., 2018; Prior & Heinämäki, 2017). In a study assessing Indigenous women's participation in environmental assessment processes, Kennedy Dalseg and colleagues (2018) found that while there were opportunities to participate in these processes, women were not prominently featured, resulting in decisions that privileged men in both traditional and wage economies, while leaving women's traditional harvesting and other important activities on the land inadequately addressed. Since Indigenous women may experience the socio-economic and environmental impacts of resource development and climate change differently than men, in some cases more severely (Koutouki et al., 2018), the failure to include them as full and equal participants conflicts not only with the Canadian state's fiduciary duty to consult with and accommodate Indigenous Peoples, but also reinforces the marginalization of Indigenous women (Kennedy Dalseg et al., 2018). A rights-based approach is needed to protect, respect, and fulfill the rights of Indigenous women in decision-making bodies on matters that affect their health and well-being, including the implementation of legislation and policies that are shaped by human rights principles (Koutouki et al., 2018). Such an approach would ensure Indigenous women are

fully, equally, and meaningfully included in decision-making processes, thereby aligning with Canada's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (Koutouki et al., 2018; Morales, 2019).

Presently, Indigenous women's roles in the community are enhanced by improved access to education, employment, and leadership opportunities. Though disparities still exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, Indigenous women have made significant gains in every level of the education system (Arriagada, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2023a). In 2021, 54.7% of Indigenous women aged 25 to 54 had obtained post-secondary qualifications (63.4% of Métis women, 50.3% of First Nations women, and 35.6% of Inuit women), compared to 44.1% of Indigenous men and 75.5% of non-Indigenous women (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Of these post-secondary qualifications, 17.7% of Indigenous women had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 7% of Indigenous men and 42.3% of non-Indigenous women. This means that Indigenous women were more than twice as likely to have a university degree compared to Indigenous men (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Among Indigenous women who graduated in 2015 with a university degree, 91% were employed three years

later, compared with 86% of Indigenous men and 92% of non-Indigenous women (Arriagada, 2021).

Unfortunately, higher rates of education do not always translate into gender equality in salaries paid, the political discourse, or in the home. In spite of the positive proportional relationship between the level of degree earned and income, Indigenous women continue to earn less than Indigenous men, though this income gap is closing. According to the 2021 Census, the gender income gap for Indigenous women declined by 1% compared to the 2016 Census (Statistics Canada, 2019b, 2023b). However, this gender income gap is not equitable across Indigenous groups, with the largest income gap existing between Métis women and men, while Inuit women are likely to earn more than Inuit men. Table 7 displays the 2021 average income levels and pay gap between Indigenous women and men, compared to the pay gap in 2016.

Indigenous women are also more likely than Indigenous men to have their main source of income come from government transfers, and to receive larger proportions of these transfers. For example, in 2015, 23.7% of Indigenous women's income was received through government transfers, compared to 16.0% of non-Indigenous women's

income and 12% of Indigenous men's income (NIEDB, 2019a). While this figure is almost double that of Indigenous men, it has been slowly decreasing, with the exception of First Nations women on reserve. The proportion of income received from government transfers was especially high for First Nations women living on reserve (nearly 40%), resulting in the largest gender gap of all Indigenous groups on this measure at approximately 17% (NIEDB, 2019a).

For many Indigenous women, addressing socio-economic inequity is critical for achieving a measure of economic independence, empowerment, and self-determination, which allows for greater freedom to leave abusive family environments or to achieve a better life for them and their children. While it appears that Indigenous women have made considerable progress in closing the gender income gap and are surpassing their male counterparts in post-secondary education, the exceptionally high cost of living in northern Canada and limited employment opportunities will continue to have strong bearing on their ability to exercise self-determination in their personal lives.

Indigenous women have made significant contributions to their communities, Nations, and Canada through their

participation in governments, advisory boards/councils, and Indigenous national, provincial/ territorial, and regional organizations. This includes participation in: Indigenous women's organizations, such as the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), Pauktuutit, and Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, and their provincial/territorial affiliated organizations; women's advisory councils for national Indigenous representative organizations, such as the Assembly of First Nations; and

provincial/regional Indigenous women's organizations, such as the Indigenous Women of the Wabanaki Territories in New Brunswick. Indigenous women have also increasingly been involved in political and leadership roles over the past two decades. Two notable appointments are Mary Simon and RoseAnne Archibald. Hon. Mary Simon was appointed Canada's 30th Governor General on July 19, 2021 – the first Indigenous and Inuk person to hold this position, while Chief RoseAnne Archibald became

the first woman to became national chief of the Assembly of First Nations on July 8, 2021 (Austen, 2021).

Indigenous women are also playing vital advisory roles in the development of relevant policies and legislation at federal and provincial/territorial levels. For example, in 2018 the federal government's Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Ministry launched an Indigenous Women's Circle. The Circle consists of women leaders and experts in public and private

TABLE 7: AVERAGE INCOME ($) AND PAY GAP (%) BY GENDER AND INDIGENOUS GROUP IN 2021, COMPARED TO 2016

Population	Indigenous	First Nations	Inuit	Métis	Non-Indigenous
Female	41,160	39,320	46,400	43,520	46,840
Male	49,080	44,800	44,840	55,650	63,250
2021 gender gap (%)	-16.1%	-12.2%	+3.5%	-21.8%	-25.94%
2016 gender gap (%)	-17.1%	-2.2%	+6.7%	-31%	-29.3%

Source: 2016 gender gap derived from Statistics Canada (2019e); 2021 Census data and gender gap derived from Statistics Canada (2023b).

sectors, drawn from universities and Indigenous women's organizations, services providers, non-profit organizations, and governments. Each member serves a two-year term advisory position. Specifically, their role is to inform the development of a federal action plan in the Status of Women Canada's three priority areas:

1. increasing women's economic security and prosperity;
2. encouraging women's leadership and democratic participation, and
3. ending violence against women and girls (WAGE, 2021a).

Provincial and territorial governments have also established ministries and departments dedicated to women and gender equality, with advisory committees that focus on addressing issues of importance to Indigenous women.

Non-profit organizations, such as the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) in Alberta, provide advocacy, programs, and services to further advance the roles and achievements of Indigenous women. These may include: financial independence training, traditional ways of healing, youth leadership development, justice initiatives, violence prevention programs, healthy relationships programs, and employment skills and training programs (IAAW, 2021). Additionally, many Indigenous women scholars conduct community-based health research across Canadian universities and work in the health care industry, where in these roles they influence policies and programs that impact the health and well-being of women, children, and families (Bourgeault et al., 2018; Cidro & Anderson, 2020).

Despite these important roles, Indigenous women continue to be under-represented in institutions such as hospital boards, academia, and provincial and federal legislatures (Hanrahan, 2021). They also remain under-represented in Indigenous community governance structures. In 2019, approximately 19% of Chiefs and 27% of band councilors in First Nations communities were women (Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics, 2021). Indigenous leaders have been working to correct this imbalance, resulting in an increase in the number of female chiefs (from 18% to 24%) and band council members (from 29% to 31%) over the 2012-2022 period (Hobson, 2022). Indigenous women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes, governance structures, and leadership roles is critical

for addressing gender inequality and social inclusion. As noted by Woroniuk and Lafrenière (2016), their participation in decision-making processes is also needed to achieve SDG 16a, related to peaceful and inclusive societies.

There is a need to encourage more Indigenous women to participate in leadership roles. Some of this work is already being done through Young Indigenous Women's Circle of Leadership programs that are being created across Canada by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, such as the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education and the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council Education Authority. These programs aim to provide young Indigenous girls and women (typically between ages 10 and 16) with guidance and foster resilience through immersion in Indigenous languages, cultures, and ways of knowing. The programs encourage healthy choices, skills development, confidence building, and greater appreciation for Indigenous languages. While these types of programs focus on Indigenous youth, others focus on enhancing the professional leadership skills of Indigenous women. For example, the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) created an Indigenous Women's Leadership Program that provides support to Indigenous women on their leadership journey, including training on leadership methods, facilitation skills, board governance training, financial accountability and transparency, public education, networking, and traditional teachings (ONWA, n.d.). More of these types of programs are needed at the community and regional level across Canada.

Indicators of social inclusion

While the current SDG indicators capture multiple dimensions of inequity and social exclusion for Indigenous women and girls, there are currently no indicators related to pay equity and few on equity in opportunities (employment, education, etc.). Current targets and indicators also do not fully account for the complexity of violence against women in rural and remote Indigenous communities, where leaving an abusive situation may be challenging. Additionally, Goal 5 uses a binary lens to address gender-specific issues, as it focuses only on women and girls and neglects gender diversity and the LGBQT2S+ community.

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The term "Two-Spirited" is an Indigenous term that extends beyond colonial terms to describe gender, sex, and sexuality and is used to refer to Indigenous people in Canada who identify themselves as LGBQT2S+ or questioning (Hunt, 2016). In the past, Two-Spirited Indigenous people were widely respected and honoured in Indigenous communities and carried unique responsibilities that were important to the collective well-being of Nations (Hunt, 2016; Thomas et al., 2021). However, the impacts of colonization have diminished their previously revered position in society and replaced it with multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization based on their Two-Spirited identity and indigeneity (Hunt, 2016; Thomas et al., 2021). This has left considerable impacts on the health and well-being of Two-Spirited individuals, fueling high rates of multiple forms of violence, HIV/AIDS, mental health issues, substance abuse, and suicide (Hunt, 2016). The SDG agenda does not specify recommendations for Two-Spirited people; however, it does promote the need for gender equality. As such, LGBQT2S+ activists interpret the term "gender" to apply to Two-Spirited and other gender diverse people. It is hoped that at a national level, targets and indicators can specifically address their health and well-being (Dorey, 2016)

Policies and legislation to promote gender equality and women's empowerment

To measure progress on gender equality and women's empowerment, SDG Indicator 5.1.1 focuses on "whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex." Over the past five years, Canada has developed national policies and legislation aimed at promoting gender equality and empowerment for women generally. It has done this through developing institutions (e.g., creation of Women and Gender Equality Canada [WAGE]), policies (e.g., amendment to the *Canada Business Corporations Act* to enhance diversity and women's representation on corporate boards and management positions), tools (e.g., gender-based analysis requirement for all federal policies), and accountability structures (OECD, 2018). Pressure has also mounted to develop a pan-Canadian strategy to advance gender equality, one that is grounded in principles of decolonization, inclusiveness, accessibility, and human rights; adopts lifelong transformative educational, trauma and violence-informed, and health focused approaches; and is democratic, accountable, and sustainably funded (Gender Equality Network Canada, 2020; see also FinDev Canada, 2019). Recommended

areas of priority for such a strategy are decolonization and reconciliation, violence against women and gender-based violence, economic security and prosperity, and accessibility, equity, equality, and inclusion.

Federal and provincial/territorial initiatives have also promoted gender equality and empowerment for Indigenous women specifically. Federally, this includes the removal of sex-based discrimination from the *Indian Act*; the development of strategies to address violence against Indigenous women and gender-based violence, and funding for projects that advance gender equality from an Indigenous perspective (WAGE, 2021b). At the provincial/territorial level, this includes the cancellation of birth alerts [39] in most provinces/territories, as well as action plans to address gender-based violence and recommendations from the NIMMIWG (see for example, the Yukon Government's [2020] MMIWG and Two-spirit+ People Strategy). Nevertheless, policies addressing gender-based violence must recognize the interconnectedness of this form of violence with poverty, housing, homelessness, and child abuse.

The release of the NIMMIWG report in 2019 has specifically drawn policy attention to gender-based violence. After its release, the federal government invested $9.6 million over 5 years to support the establishment of the RCMP's new National Office of Investigative Standards and Practices. The purpose of this office is to set national standards and provide oversight for high profile/major case investigations, including those related to violence against Indigenous women and girls (CIRNAC, 2019). This change is partially intended to ensure that cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls are granted sufficient and equal attention to other cases. The federal government also released a national action plan to address gender-based violence in 2020 (Public Safety Canada, 2020), a national action plan to address recommendations from the NIMMIWG in 2021 (Government of Canada, 2021c), and has released one

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[39] Birth alerts involve social workers flagging expectant parent(s) who are presumed to put their newborn at risk. The practice takes place without the parent(s) consent. Once the baby is born, the hospital then notifies the social worker, which sometimes results in the apprehension of the child (Marelj & Vikander, 2021). Advocates have argued that the practice is a form of state surveillance based on a series of assumptions that may be false or rooted in racism and police families rather than support them (Mareli & Vikander, 2021). Currently, only Quebec has not eliminated birth alerts.

annual progress report on the NIMMIWG national action plan (Government of Canada, 2022). In 2021, both the RCMP and CIRNAC implemented strategies and action plans to respond to recommendations of the NIMMIWG. The RCMP's *Vision 150* plan aims to change organizational culture and transform it into a modern, inclusive, and stronger organization, with initiatives and indicators to track progress in four key areas: people, culture, stewardship, and policing services (RCMP, 2021). CIRNAC (2021b) implemented the *Federal pathway to address missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People*. The strategy adopts a distinctions-based approach to ending violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people that is anchored in a holistic and trauma-informed approach, principles of respect for human rights, leadership and self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, and cultural safety and humility. In response to these federal efforts, the Native Women's Association of Canada developed its own national plan due to their perception that the federal government's approach lacked meaningful action and was "toxic [and] dysfunctional"

(Wright, 2021a). NWAC's response is indicative of the need to move past aspirational documents and put into effect Indigenous-led and culturally appropriate interventions and prevention strategies for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people at risk.

The intergenerational impacts of colonial policies like the imposition of the residential school system, past and current child welfare policies, and socio-economic marginalization, have differentially impacted the health and well-being of Indigenous women and gender diverse individuals. This makes it challenging to address the issues that affect their health and well-being and achieve equity with Indigenous men and within broader Canadian society. Addressing the myriad of issues and inequities that these individuals face will be critical to re-establishing healthy families and communities, particularly since Indigenous women are the primary caregivers. The implementation and monitoring of Goal 5 within Indigenous communities will therefore augment the work that has already begun to address gender-based inequities.

Reduce inequality within and among countries (Goal 10)

SDG 10 includes multiple dimensions of inequality, including income; social, economic and political inclusion; participation in decision-making, laws, policies, and practices; among others. Many of these dimensions target underdeveloped countries, while others (such as aspects of income inequality and social, economic, and political inclusion) also pertain to Indigenous Peoples in Canada. This section focuses primarily on Target 10.3, "equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and actions in this regard." This dimension of inequity is unique to Indigenous Peoples, as no other ethnic group in Canada has been, and continues to be, subjected to such a long history of discriminatory laws and policies, as well as human rights violations. As other elements of this goal have been discussed elsewhere, this section will focus on Indigenous Peoples' inequitable access to specific services and the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples of their lands and resources.

Inequitable access to services

Indigenous Peoples in Canada have had a long history of colonialism aimed at assimilating their communities into settler society, thereby weakening their societies, economies, and governments, and creating social, economic, and political marginalization. A key contributor to this socio-economic marginalization is the longstanding history of underfunding public services on reserve, including education, health care, and social services, among others. Chronic underfunding, in turn, has resulted in considerable disparities in the health and well-being of Indigenous children and families. The federal government has implemented some policies and legislation over the past decade to address some of these disparities, including the implementation of Jordan's Principle,[40] the Inuit Child First Initiative,[41] and

the removal of the 2% annual federal funding cap for First Nations programs and services in 2015 (T. Fontaine, 2015). In 2019, the federal government also passed the *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.*[42] This Act emphasizes Indigenous self-determination in child welfare and has the potential to transform the child welfare system through the implementation of culturally appropriate and strengths-based frameworks for understanding and responding to cases of child neglect – a key issue currently driving the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system (Caldwell & Sinha, 2020).

Despite these positive changes, barriers to and gaps in the delivery of health, education, and social services for Indigenous children and their families persist. This is due, in part, to a lack of sustained

federal funding and inadequate data collection to inform decision-making related to Indigenous children's health and well-being (Caldwell & Sinha, 2020; FNCFCS et al., 2021; Garrett, 2021; Kamran, 2021; Toombs et al., 2018). While information on Inuit and Métis children and families is lacking, barriers to equitable access to services for First Nations and other Indigenous children and youth are well-noted. They include:

- lack of early intervention and disability services;

- lack of transition planning for youth aging out of service eligibility with continuing needs;

- difficulty accessing funding to support infrastructure improvements for children with disabilities and special needs;

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[40] Jordan's Principle is a child-first principle that ensures First Nations children, both on and off-reserve, are able to access the services they need when they need them. This principle is named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, a First Nation child from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba, who was born with complex medical needs. A jurisdictional dispute between the federal and provincial government over who should pay for his at home care resulted in his death in the hospital at 5 years of age, without ever having spent a day in his family home (FNCFCS, 2021). The principle affirms that when services are requested, the government of first contact is financially responsible and jurisdictional disputes over payment will be resolved at a later point in time. The breadth of services covered under the principle includes education, health, early childhood, and recreation services, as well as culture and language services.

[41] The Inuit Child First Initiative extends the same types of services provided to First Nations through Jordan's Principle to Inuit children, ensuring they are also able to access essential government funded health, social, and educational products, services, and supports they need, when they need them.

[42] This Act came into force on January 1, 2020, and affirms the rights of First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples to exercise jurisdiction over health and social services, based on national principles of best interests of the child, cultural continuity, and substantive equality. Under the legislation, Indigenous groups have two options to exercise jurisdiction: the first option allows them to send a notice to the Minister of Indigenous Services and relevant provincial/territorial governments of their intent to exercise jurisdiction, leaving federal and provincial/territorial laws over child and family services to prevail; the second option allows the relevant parties to enter a tripartite coordination agreement, allowing First Nations laws on child and family services to prevail (Ministry of Justice, 2019).

- onerous (re)application processes required to prove present or continued need of services under Jordan's Principle;

- misalignment between fiscal years of the federal government and K-12 schools to support funding commitments;

- on-going legal challenges between the federal government and advocates for First Nations children regarding eligibility under Jordan's Principle;

- chronic underfunding, determined based on community population size rather than number of children and families in need; and

- ill-representative approaches to allocating resources that focus on meeting the immediate needs of individual children, without consideration for their lived realities, including basic determinants of health such as access to safe drinking water (FNCFCS et al., 2021; Gerlach et al., 2020).

Limited access to culturally appropriate services also poses barriers for urban Indigenous populations (Carrière & Richardson., 2017; FNCFCS et al., 2021). As noted by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and others, the extent of inequities is too widespread and ingrained to fix in a piecemeal way (FNCFCS et al., 2021, p. 25). Major systemic and structural reforms and investments are required. This may include a shift in focus from responding to individual children's needs towards building authentic relationships with First Nation communities and families so as to better understand their unique social and community contexts. Recommendations are also made to implement First Nations led, designed, and delivered services and to initiate federal reforms to address service gaps, create long-term sustainable funding for First Nations communities, and advance health equity for First Nations (Gerlach et al., 2021). A thorough and independent evaluation is also needed across governments to identify and address ongoing discriminatory ideologies, policies, and practices in health care and social service systems (FNCFCS, n.d.).

Indigenous children are vastly over-represented in Canada's child welfare system and in 2021, constituted more than half of all children 0 to 14 years in foster care, despite comprising only 7.7% of all children in this age range (ISC, 2022). In 2007, the FNCFCS and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) filed a human rights complaint against the Canadian government, in response to ongoing inequitable funding in the child welfare system. In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that the federal government had, in fact, been discriminating against First Nations children by underfunding child welfare services on reserve and failing to implement Jordan's Principle (ISC, 2021g). As part of its remedial process, the tribunal ordered the federal government to pay $40,000 in compensation to all First Nations children who were removed from their homes, families, and communities or who

Indigenous children are vastly over-represented in Canada's child welfare system and in 2021, constituted more than half of all children 0 to 14 years in foster care, despite comprising only 7.7% of all children in this age range

(ISC, 2022).

experienced denials, unreasonable delays, or service gaps in relation to essential services, contrary to Jordan's Principle. Despite this decision, the government failed to properly comply with the ruling (Blackstock et al., 2020).

Over subsequent years, the federal government worked with First Nations leadership to correct the wrongs of Canada's narrow application of Jordan's Principle, culminating in the announcement of a revised final settlement agreement in April 2023, totaling more than $23 billion in compensation to First Nations children and families, which was approved by the Federal Court of Canada in October 2023 (ISC, 2023e). The process to implement the settlement is anticipated to begin later in 2024.

Finally, in 2021, the federal government also announced its plans to co-develop distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation, in recognition of the need to address inequities and the discrimination that First Nations people, Inuit, and Métis people face when accessing health services. This legislation will establish overarching principles as a foundation for federal health services; advance federal government commitments made in relation to the TRC's Calls to Action and the NIMMIWG's Calls to Justice; address systemic anti-Indigenous racism in the healthcare system; and support health service transformation

through "collaboration with Indigenous organizations in the development, provision and improvement of services to increase Indigenous-led health service delivery" (ISC, 2021h, n.p.). To date, reports have been generated from engagement sessions with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis partners and communities. They highlight nine over-arching goals that focus on:

1. treating Indigenous Peoples as equals and transforming systems to remove settler-colonial policies and discriminatory practices;
2. exercising sovereignty and self-determination;
3. utilizing holistic approaches that encompass Indigenous ways of knowing and being and the social determinants of health.
4. ensuring accountability of the health system to Indigenous Peoples;
5. maintaining respectful relationships between Indigenous Peoples and the Government of Canada.
6. providing equitable, adequate, sustainable, inclusive, and flexible funding to Indigenous Peoples and communities.
7. ensuring Indigenous control over data and information.
8. meeting critical health service needs; and
9. supporting and building capacity in health human resources (ISC, 2023a).

Dispossession from land and resources

The dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their lands is a well-recognized contributor to the inequities they face. Various Supreme Court judgements have stipulated that Indigenous Peoples have inherent rights in relation to their unceded lands and that industrial activities on these lands require consultation with Indigenous Peoples and their consent. The principles of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), as entrenched in the UNDRIP and adopted by Canada under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, have emerged as legal requirements to inform relations between Indigenous Peoples, states, and extractive industries (Papillon & Rodon, 2017). Aboriginal and treaty rights are also entrenched in Section 35 the *Constitution Act* of 1982. These actions have resulted in Indigenous Peoples' increasing agency in shaping decisions about resource development on their traditional lands. However, there have been many instances where Indigenous Peoples' lands and resource rights have failed to be protected in the face of natural resource extraction and development activities. The gap between how FPIC is interpreted and operationalized can be considerable due to varying interpretations of how consent must be obtained or expressed. There have also been instances of federal and/or

While respect for human rights and benefit sharing is now an integral element of corporate social responsibility obligations as they pertain to natural resource development and extraction decision-making, challenges remain that call into question the legitimacy of EIAs and IBAs

(Craik et al., 2017).

provincial/territorial reluctance to abide by requirements of obtain FPIC, in order to assert authority and protect the economic interests of their political economy and natural resource sector above Indigenous rights (Papillon & Rodon, 2017).

In the context of large resource extraction and development processes, the duty to consult, accommodate and, in some cases, seek the consent of Indigenous Peoples, primarily occurs through environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and impact and benefit agreements (IBAs) (Papillon & Rodon, 2017). EIAs were originally designed to mitigate the environmental impacts of resource development projects, but with the federal government's retooling of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency in 2019 into the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, they are now required to account for economic, social, and health impacts as well. IBAs differ, as they are private, often confidential, negotiated agreements between corporations and Indigenous representative organizations that do not directly involve governments. IBAs aim to achieve social acceptability of projects, by enhancing trust between signatory parties and addressing potential adverse effects of projects through mitigation measures, financial compensation, and economic benefits.

While respect for human rights and benefit sharing are now integral elements of corporate social responsibility obligations as they pertain to natural resource development and extraction decision-making, challenges remain that call into question the legitimacy of EIAs and IBAs (Craik et al., 2017). Since these processes occur at the leadership level, the benefits derived from these agreements tend to reflect the values and priorities of the community's representatives, which may conflict with those at the community-level. For example, these types of processes demonstrate considerable gender imbalances in relation to Indigenous engagement, reflecting men's perspectives more than women's (Kuokkanen, 2019). Additionally, these processes continue to give advantage to resource development companies and non-Indigenous governments, which can exert power over economically disadvantaged

Indigenous communities that are seeking to enhance well-being for their community members (Baker & Westman, 2018; Samson, 2016). As a result, EIAs and IBAs often do not work in the interests of the many affected people and result in a continued disregard for Indigenous rights and livelihoods (Moore et al., 2017).

There is also the issue of the failure to recognize Métis rights, something that contradicts the Canadian Constitution's recognition of Métis as one of three distinct Indigenous populations in Canada. In the past, Métis have been under-represented in natural resource decision-making processes and negotiations (Wanvik & Caine, 2017). The 2016 ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada, known as the *Daniels Decision*, declared Métis and non-status First Nations as equal parties recognized under Section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act* (INAC, 2016). This decision affirms the federal government's fiduciary duty to consult and negotiate with the Métis in good faith on issues that affect them. Since 2016, Métis communities and organizations have signed many agreements with the Crown, committing to new nation-

to-nation, government-to-government relationships, and they have been included in the federal government's *Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework*,[43] announced in February 2018 (Gaudry, 2018). The challenge, however, lies in determining who qualifies as rights-holders and to whom the duty to consult and accommodate is owed, the geographic scope of the rights-holder, and the persons entitled to represent the rights-holder during consultation about said right (Drake, 2021).

A major step in meeting Target 10.3 as it pertains to Indigenous Peoples is Canada's adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* in 2021. The Act aims to advance implementation of UNDRIP in Canada by mandating an action plan be developed to achieve the Declaration's objectives and ensure that federal laws align with the Declaration, holding Canada accountable on progress achieved (Ministry of Justice, 2021). The Act affirms Indigenous and treaty rights and Canada's commitment to working with Indigenous Peoples on implementation. Key elements of the Act include provisions to address injustices; eliminate all

forms of violence, racism, and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples; and promote mutual respect and understanding. While several provincial and territorial governments have taken some actions to respond to the UNDRIP, so far only the Government of BC (2019a) has passed legislation that mandates alignment of provincial laws to the UNDRIP.

The federal government has also developed the Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework to demonstrate its commitment to move away from the status quo and fundamentally change Canada's relationship with Indigenous Peoples by recognizing rights as the basis for relations (Wilson-Raybould, 2018). There is a broader concern with this approach surrounding the appropriateness of having an Indigenous rights recognition framework guide Indigenous relations with the federal government. Some have argued that the concept and nature of the framework is fundamentally flawed because rights are described through a colonial lens (Perley & Peach, 2018). As treaty relationships do not grant the Crown authority to define Indigenous rights, the

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[43] The Recognition and Implementation of Indigenous Rights Framework, announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2018, was developed in full partnership with First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples to advance its work in relation to reconciliation (CIRNAC, 2018). The Framework aims to make recognition and implementation of rights the basis for all relations between Indigenous Peoples and governments, with measures to support the rebuilding of Indigenous Nations and governments and advance Indigenous self-determination.

language and process used to develop the framework must be decolonized and reflect principles of sovereignty (Perley & Peach, 2018). Others feel the framework is "another re-articulation or reformulation of older policies of dispossession" (Pictou, 2018, n.p.), and argue that the full realization of Indigenous Peoples' free, prior, and informed consent will continue to be challenged under this framework, with Indigenous rights continuing to be subjugated in natural resource decision-making processes. Nevertheless, adopting a rights-based framework for advancing reconciliation represents a way forward to reduce inequality for First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

Measuring progress on reducing inequality for Indigenous Peoples

The above legal, policy, and practice examples highlight the importance of Target 10.3 for addressing inequities for Indigenous Peoples in Canada. While targets under SDG 10 focus on promoting social, economic, and political inclusion, and eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, only one indicator focuses on discrimination. Indicator 10.3.1 measures: "the proportion of the population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed within the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law." Some indicators under Goal 16 may also be useful for addressing discrimination and reducing inequality for Indigenous Peoples and will be discussed in the next section.

While indicator 10.3.1 may be sufficient for capturing isolated instances of discrimination and/or harassment as reported to Canada's Human Rights Tribunal or justice system, it is likely to be insufficient for capturing the scope and scale of discrimination and racism that Indigenous Peoples experience within economic, social, and political settings. This discrimination and racism manifests in federal and provincial/territorial laws, policies, and services; within law enforcement, justice, education, child welfare, and healthcare systems; in the media; and elsewhere. This lone indicator also fails to account for the deep power imbalances that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Addressing these sources of inequity will require structural change, as well as a deeper understanding among non-Indigenous populations of the underlying sources of socio-economic marginalization and health inequities for Indigenous Peoples and the role that power plays in perpetuating them.

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels (Goal 16)

Sustainable development is intricately connected to peaceful and inclusive societies (United Nations, 2015). When people are able to live without fear of violence or discrimination, have equal access to the resources they need to contribute to their communities and society at large, and when their communities support them to flourish spiritually, culturally, emotionally, and intellectually, it creates an environment where innovation is encouraged and economic growth may occur. SDG 16 and its 12 targets address human rights and the ways in which political and legal systems may protect them (Craig, 2016). In particular, Goal 16 calls for an end to violence and child abuse (Target 16.2), as well as non-discriminatory policies and inclusive representation and participation across all levels of governance (Target 16.7). The historical practices of European colonial settlement have had major consequences for Indigenous women, children, youth, families, and communities in the form of high rates of violence against

Indigenous women, child abuse, and incarceration, perpetuated by discriminatory colonial policies and practices in the child welfare, judicial, and correctional justice systems.

As noted earlier, Indigenous Peoples have disproportionately higher rates of exposure to the child welfare system. Involvement in the child welfare system is associated with poorer health and life outcomes for Indigenous people. Removal from the home by child protection authorities has been found to be associated with homelessness among Inuit youth (Kidd et al., 2019). A study in Alberta found that Indigenous children in care are significantly more likely to die than their non-Indigenous counterparts, especially of causes categorized as suicide, homicide, accidental, or unknown (Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, 2014). Indigenous children in care also have higher mortality rates than Indigenous children who are not in care. Being uprooted from families and communities and moved around the child welfare system may be a painful and traumatic experience, leading to mental health issues and addictions that can perpetuate the cycle of trauma (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020; Navia et al., 2018). For this reason, Canadian child welfare systems are considered by many researchers and advocates as a continuation

of the legacy of residential schools (Barker et al., 2019; McKenzie et al., 2016; Wright, 2021b).

Indigenous people are also increasingly over-represented in the correctional justice system (see the section titled *Equality and social inclusiveness* for related information on the over-incarceration of Indigenous women). In 2020, Indigenous people comprised more than 30% of the inmate population in federal penitentiaries, despite making up just approximately 5% of the Canadian population (Office of the Correctional Investigator [OCI], 2020). This represents an increase of 43.4% since 2010, while the non-Indigenous incarceration rate declined by 13.7% over this period. For Indigenous women, who accounted for 50% of the female inmate population in 2022 (Zinger, 2022), the rate is even more troubling. Some of the contributing causes of this over-incarceration of Indigenous Peoples may be attributed to colonialism, its impacts on socio-economic marginalization, and ongoing systemic discrimination (Department of Justice, 2020). Despite promises and commitments made by political leaders to address the over-incarceration of Indigenous people in Canadian jails and prisons, the trend has not yet been reversed. The harsher treatment of Indigenous inmates

in the correctional system,[44] high rates of recidivism, as well ineffective measures to address underlying reasons for offending are all likely contributing factors to the increasing trend of over-incarceration of Indigenous people (OCI, 2020). Incarceration rates are expected to continue to rise because of the high rate of Indigenous youth involvement with correctional services (Ministry of Justice, 2019).

The unique circumstances and social histories of Indigenous Peoples give rise to higher and unequal rates of offending and victimization. This is aggravated further by child welfare, judicial, and correctional systems that are dominated by Western worldviews, languages, and structures. Such systems fail to account for the root causes of high incarceration and child apprehension rates – namely socio-economic marginalization, substance abuse, and family violence, all of which are the result of intergenerational trauma (Aboriginal Healing Foundation

[AHF], 2005; Cesaroni et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2019; OCI, 2014). To address these issues, the correctional, judicial, and child welfare systems need to depart from colonial structures and support justice practices and systems that emanate from Indigenous communities and are more culturally appropriate and sensitive (AHF, 2005; OCI, 2015, 2020). This requires the use of holistic approaches that incorporate Indigenous worldviews and practices and foster self-determination, such as Indigenous Justice Systems,[45] sentencing circles, family conferencing circles, and kinship care. In cases where Indigenous people must interact with mainstream child welfare, judicial, or correctional systems, there is a need for culturally safe practices and strategies that will improve trust and relationships in all interactions, through the use of system-wide cultural safety training, interpreters, Indigenous legal representatives, and other strategies.

The SDGs are fundamental to achieving equity and fairness in child welfare and justice systems. Target 16.b requires the promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies, including reformation of the police system and policies that address racism. If Canada is to effectively decrease the rates of Indigenous offenders and make Indigenous communities and Canada more peaceful and safer for all, issues of child and adult education, meaningful employment, and accessible health and social services must also be addressed (F. Green, 2017). Additionally, Target 10.3, and it associated indicator on discrimination and harassment, could also be used to improve monitoring of the implementation of equality-based strategies such as Jordan's Principle to enhance equity and fairness in child welfare and health, as well as the monitoring of differences in the treatment of Indigenous offenders in the justice system.

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[44] Indigenous inmates are more likely to be classified and placed in maximum security institutions and segregation units, are over-represented in use of force and self-injurious incidents and serve a higher proportion of their sentence behind bars before being granted parole (OCI, 2020).

[45] Indigenous Justice Systems or programs are community-based justice systems that offer alternative legal proceedings to mainstream justice processes to assist Indigenous people exert greater responsibility over the administration of justice in their communities (Government of Canada, 2021a).

The environment

Economic growth, social issues, and the environment are all interrelated. Preservation of the environment is an integral part of sustainable development, as industrialization and economic growth can have detrimental effects on the environment if left unchecked. The environment in which we live can also have detrimental, as well as beneficial, effects on our health and well-being.

Indigenous Peoples have a special relationship to the land, as the land is central to their cultures, identities, and knowledges (Richmond, 2018, Vandry et al., 2019). They recognize that their physical, mental, and spiritual health and well-being is dependent on the health of the land. As such, Indigenous Peoples have worked for generations to protect the land, sustaining it through the "acquisition, sharing, and practice of Indigenous knowledge" (Richmond, 2018, p. 167). It is well recognized that processes of environmental

dispossession associated with colonialism, including forced relocation to marginal lands and environmental contamination from resource extraction and economic development activities, have contributed greatly to many of the health inequities Indigenous people experience today. Climate change has the potential to further disrupt their relationship to the land and exacerbate health and socio-economic inequities for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations (NCCIH, 2022b). SDG goals related to the environment are thus especially pertinent to the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples.

SDGs related to the environment include SDG 6 (water and sanitation), 7 (energy), 12 (sustainable consumption patterns), 13 (climate), 14 (oceans, seas, and marine resources), and 15 (preserving terrestrial species and ecosystems). While a detailed discussion of these goals is beyond the scope of this report, this section will provide a brief description of the impact of Goals 6 and 13 on the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples.

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (Goal 6)

With approximately 7% of the world's total renewable freshwater supply, Canada has an abundance of available water (Government of Canada, 2017b). Water is very important to resource extraction, energy generation, and manufacturing industries. It is linked to several SDGs, including sustainable production of energy (SDG 7), infrastructure and technology development (SDG 9), economic growth (SDG 8), and sustainable production and consumption patterns (SDG 12). Changes in the climate (SDG 13) and marine and ocean biodiversity (SDG 14) are also linked to water conservation. Despite Canada's abundance of water, safe drinking water is not equitably available across Canada.

The availability of safe drinking water is a critical issue affecting health in many Indigenous communities. This is an especially pertinent issue given that previous government policies have put Indigenous communities into locations where water supply is inadequate, and chronic underfunding has left communities with inadequate water and wastewater management systems (Keele, 2021). As of January 2023, there were 33 long-term (ISC, 2023b) and 28 short-term (ISC,

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(Richmond, 2018, p. 167).

2023c) drinking water advisories (DWA) in effect in First Nations communities in Canada. This represents an improvement over time, with 137 long-term drinking advisories lifted since November 2015. While no recent data are available for Inuit communities, inadequate water infrastructure has also left them vulnerable to boil water advisories (The Borgen Project, 2022). Between January 2015 and October 1, 2020, 298 boil water advisories were issued for 29 of 51 communities in Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland in Canada (Inuit Circumpolar Council & ITK, 2021). Some communities have been under a DWA for decades, such as Neskantaga First Nation in Ontario, who have had unsafe drinking water since 1995 (ISC, 2021i). SDG 6, and its associated targets, is therefore an important goal for Indigenous Peoples in Canada over the next fifteen years.

The Government of Canada has expressed its commitment to providing safe drinking water and sanitation for all its citizens. This commitment has been reflected in the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS).

One of the goals of the 2019-2022 strategy focused on providing safe drinking water to affected Indigenous communities by investing in water infrastructure, engaging in sustainable agricultural practices, considering the impacts of climate change on water systems, and protecting lakes in partnership with Indigenous Peoples (Environment and Climate Change Canada [ECCC], 2019). A new, four-year FSDS was released in 2022 to build on the previous strategy and incorporate First Nations, Inuit, and Métis perspectives, thus resulting in a distinctions-based approach and greater balance among all dimensions of sustainable development through integration of social and economic goals and targets (ECCC, 2022). The new strategy directs federal funding to upgrade water and wastewater infrastructure on reserves, improve monitoring and testing of drinking water, as well as advance reconciliation through the approval of the Safe Drinking Water Settlement Agreement.[46] New targets and indicators are also embedded in the new strategy to ensure the majority of ISC-funded First Nations drinking water systems

meet Canadian Drinking Water Quality Guidelines (97% of systems by 2026) and ISC-funded wastewater systems achieve effluent quality standards (85% of systems by 2030).

Significant investments have already been made to improve water and wastewater infrastructure on First Nations reserves, including the construction of 102 new water and wastewater treatment plants/lagoons, 470 renovations or upgrades to existing water systems, 72 feasibility studies, and 89 supporting projects such as training and capacity building (ISC, 2021j). Moreover, as part of the federal government's mandate to gradually transfer services to First Nations-led organizations, the responsibility for the delivery of water and wastewater services in the Atlantic Region was transferred to the Atlantic First Nations Water Authority in June 2021 (ISC, 2021k). This action was the first of its kind in Canada and is a step towards addressing Target 6.b, "support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management."

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[46] The Agreement stems from a court approved settlement of $8 billion stemming from a class action lawsuit between Canada and certain First Nations and their members who were subject to a long-term drinking advisory (of at least one year) between November 20, 1995 and June 20, 2021 (First Nations Drinking Water Settlement, 2021). The settlement provides compensation for impacted First Nations communities and eligible individuals, with additional funds for those who experienced specified injuries resulting from drinking water advisories, along with commitments to fund construction, operation, and maintenance of water infrastructure for First Nations to develop their own safe drinking water by-laws and initiatives.

In 2021, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAGC) reviewed ISC's progress in addressing the water crisis in First Nations communities. The review revealed that ISC had not met its commitment outlined in the strategy to eliminate long-term drinking water advisories. First Nations water systems on reserve continue to face several challenges, including the continued use of outdated operations and maintenance funding formulas (developed 30 years prior for First Nations water systems); the failure to fix a salary gap that contributes to problems in retaining qualified water system operators; the lack of a regulatory regime to ensure access to safe drinking water in First Nations communities; and the continued focus on short-term temporary solutions to address immediate problems rather than long-term solutions (OAGC, 2021). Addressing these challenges will be key to facilitating improvements in First Nations water systems on reserve.

Similarly, the federal government promised to preserve waterways and ocean-based species. It set out a new target and indicator focused on establishing action plans to advance restoration and protection of major lakes and rivers by 2027, and identified milestones to support this target (ECCC, 2022). These commitments partially address Target 6.3, which focuses on improving water quality by reducing pollution. However, the current indicators used to measure progress on Goal 6 fail to capture the significant climate change impacts on the quality, quantity, and accessibility of water. For Indigenous populations whose diets rely heavily on the harvest of country foods, the impacts of climate change on water (and the food sources that rely on that water) have the potential to magnify the disproportionate burden of water-associated issues already experienced by First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as well as magnify food insecurity (Kluane First Nation & Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research, 2016; McKnight, 2017; Poesch et al., 2016; Sanderson et al., 2015).

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (Goal 13)

Across Canada, adverse climatatic changes have led to a rise in global air and ocean temperatures, a rise in sea levels, and frequent and severe wildfires, storms, heat waves, and pest outbreaks. These climatic changes affect all persons, but uniquely affect northern Indigenous Peoples due to their remoteness and strong relationship to the land. Climate change has the potential to impact traditional lifestyles, resource development, and conservation, as well as infrastructure related to

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transportation, water and waste disposal, housing, and health (Kipp et al., 2019; NCCIH, 2022b). For example, warm winter weathers resulting from climatic changes in northern Ontario have led to delays in the formation of ice roads, reducing food supplies and the provision of diesel for use as energy, and stopping all development projects such as a nursing center in Sandy Lake First Nation (Porter, 2017).

In 2014, the Department of Environment in Nunavut released a report on climate change for Inuit in the territory (Government of Nunavut, 2014). This report revealed that air and ocean temperatures in the region had been rising at two times the global rate, resulting in changes to the distinctive features of the land, seas, ice, and biodiversity. In turn, these changes were affecting food security and shelter, as well as clean air and the supply and availability of safe water and country foods. Inuit cultures were also affected by this change, as many Elders reported that changes in climate did not fit with their traditional knowledge of the weather and land area, which affected their ability to participate in traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, and gathering (Government of

Nunavut, 2014). Additionally, biodiversity loss was being exacerbated by the introduction of new species or organisms that may lead to new diseases and unstable ice conditions due to increased temperature may increase the risk of physical injuries (Government of Nunavut, 2014; NCCIH, 2022b).

While much of the available research on the impacts of climate change is focused on northern Indigenous people, southern Indigenous people also feel the effects of climate change. Issues in the south range from:

- increased safety risks resulting from frequent weather-related events (e.g., flooding, wildfires),

- loss of traditional foods and medicines,

- loss of Indigenous knowledges related to food gathering activities,

- loss of cultural sites due to rising sea levels, and

- other impacts on traditional Indigenous economies which may perpetuate poverty and inequality (Deen et al., 2021; Marushka et al., 2019; NCCIH, 2022b; Sritharan, 2017; Whitney et al., 2020).

Collectively, these impacts are leading to increased mental health issues and "ecological grief" [47] among Indigenous Peoples (Comtesse et al., 2021; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Cunsolo et al., 2020).

Adapting to the adverse effects of climate change is therefore a priority for many Indigenous communities. Partnerships formed both locally and nationally are integral to tackling the impacts of climate on the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Currently, indicators related to SDG 13 are too broad in scope to capture the increased vulnerability that Indigenous Peoples in Canada have to climate change. In the absence of more locally defined indicators, such as the number of Indigenous communities that have climate change monitoring programs, undertaken climate change risk and vulnerability assessments, or developed climate change adaptation plans, there is no way to measure progress on this particular goal as it pertains to these particularly vulnerable populations.

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[47] The term 'ecological grief' is defined by Cunsolo & Ellis (2018) as "the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change" (p. 275).

Addressing the SDGs – an Inuit perspective

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's "Linkages Report" draws connections between SDGs and work done at ITK to address colonization, prejudice, and social inequalities faced by Inuit (ITK, 2022). The first phase of the project, conducted through internal engagements at ITK in the winter of 2022, identified the strongest links with SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14,15 and 17. This case study highlights examples of ITK's work to advance the SDGs in four key areas: ending poverty (SDG 1), zero hunger (part of SDG 2), good health and well-being (SDG 3), and partnerships for the Goals (part of SDG 17).

In relation to SDG 1 (End poverty), ITK has been working to develop and implement an Inuit Nunangat Poverty Reduction Strategy and Implementation plan. The plan will utilize a holistic, Inuit-specific and gender-based analysis+ lens to examine poverty and incorporate strength-based approaches.

In relation to SDG 2 (Zero hunger), ITK's "Inuit Food Security Strategy" and school food programs work to guide efforts to improve access to affordable and nutritious food for all Inuit.

Within the SDGs, there is only one Inuit-specific indicator included in the Canadian Indicator Framework, and this indicator is related to tuberculous (TB). The development of this indicator (in SGD 3 Good health and Wellbeing) was influenced by the disproportionately high rate of TB among Inuit. As a result of these rates of TB among Inuit, ITK has worked in partnership with the Tuberculosis Elimination Task Force, the Inuit TB Committee, and the Inuit Public Health Task Group to develop the Tuberculosis Elimination Framework. The framework guides the development of holistic, systematic, and evidence-based regional action plans that provide a roadmap for actions and resources needed to eliminate TB within each Inuit region by 2030.

Lastly, in relation to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals), in 2022, ITK released a distinctions-based Inuit Nunangat Policy which outlines an approach for the design and renewal of all federal initiatives that apply in Inuit Nunangat or benefit Inuit. This policy will strengthen partnerships and allow federal funding to overcome jurisdictional barriers that target Inuit across the four individual Inuit land claims regions. However, for Canada to meet its commitment to the SDGs in relation to the Inuit, more sustainable and stable investment is needed to address the profound existing inequalities between Inuit Nunangat and the rest of Canada. There is also a need for the SDGs to gather more appropriate and adequate data on the status of SDG indicators in Inuit Nunangat and develop indicators that better reflect the unique development challenges Inuit face. This includes developing more Inuit-specific indicators that would accurately reflect the unique context of poverty in Inuit Nunangat, including the high cost of living and other challenges Inuit face in accessing resources.

Source: ITK (2022).

The importance of partnerships

Partnership remains one of the cornerstones of the SDG resolution. Goal 17 aims to "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development." This includes partnerships within and between countries. In Canada, partnerships may include collaborations among different Indigenous Nations and communities, as well as relationships between settler allies and Indigenous Peoples. Partnerships between Indigenous Peoples in Canada and various international actors or among different groups of Indigenous people are beyond the scope of this report. This section focuses specifically on the importance of relationships between settler allies and Indigenous Peoples in achieving the SDGs. As a result of Canada's tragic history with Indigenous Peoples, we must go beyond the global targets set by the United Nations to identify partnership goals that will foster

our ability to achieve the SDGs for Indigenous Peoples by 2030.

Partnership occurs when people come together to advance mutual interests through collaboration and cooperation. This collaboration and cooperation cannot be based on "us" and "them" narratives, but rather on complementary actions to address the SDGs nationally and among Indigenous Peoples, and to narrow the socio-economic and health gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Strengthening relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is a key component of reconciliation, which Phil Fontaine (2015) notes:

> *includes knowing, it includes learning, it includes understanding and accepting the truth of the situation… we have to change our origin story, we have to change the narrative, we must accept reality, the reality that becomes part of our history and that includes…addressing this notion of nation to nation relationship. (n.p.)*

For partnerships to be successful in tackling actions on the SDGs, there must be a collective acknowledgement of the past, as well as collective agreement of where the country wants to go for the future. Moreover, efforts must be made to engage and work with Indigenous Peoples and emphasize community-driven and -based programs that involve *working with* Indigenous Peoples rather than for Indigenous Peoples (Johnson et al., 2016). Furthermore, increasing Indigenous Peoples' involvement in decision-making processes and representation in leadership roles, along with a renewed commitment to improving health and social services for communities on and off reserve, and in rural, remote, and urban areas, are key to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Building effective partnerships must involve leadership and frontline workers across all levels of government and within health and social systems. System-wide partnerships are possible when respectful relationships are formed.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), set up by the Federal Government in 2008, was a first step towards establishing partnerships and improving relationships between Indigenous Peoples and settler allies within Canada. Since the release of the TRC's Calls to Action in 2015, progress has been made, with key components focused on relationship and partnership building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, communities, and organizations to work together collaboratively to address joint issues. These partnerships have occurred at the local, regional, provincial/territorial, and national levels, as well as within public, private, charitable, and corporate sectors.

At the federal level, Trudeau's Liberal Government expressed its commitment to "achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership as the foundation for transformative change" (Government of Canada, 2021b, para. 1). This commitment is based on a recognition of Indigenous Peoples' special constitutional relationship with the Crown, that Indigenous self-government and laws are critical to the future of Canada, and that Indigenous perspectives and rights must be incorporated into all aspects of the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Crown. Furthermore, the commitment reflects an increased drive to work alongside Indigenous communities and national representative organizations across Canada on key priority areas, such as: establishing Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination discussion tables; developing and signing numerous self-government agreements; co-developing strategies to address specific health issues with Indigenous partners; and creating policies and legislation to enable Indigenous self-determination in areas of health, early child development, and child welfare. While collaboration does come with challenges, as evidenced by the NWAC's dissatisfaction with the federal government's process to address calls to justice from the NIMMIWG (see NWAC, 2021), collaborative efforts foster norms and expectations around engagement with Indigenous Peoples across Canada that are mirrored by other levels of government, industry, and organizations. It is no longer acceptable that decisions be made on matters that affect Indigenous Peoples without their meaningful participation throughout decision-making processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Progress made on 2018 recommendations to achieve SDG targets

The 2018 edition of this SDGs report made several recommendations regarding the implementation and monitoring of SDGs as they relate to Indigenous Peoples in Canada. These recommendations were focused on ensuring Indigenous Peoples were not left behind from the benefits of development. Specifically, they recommended:

redefining poverty alleviation among Indigenous Peoples from the narrow, income-based, individualistic perspective framed in the SDG document to reflect community poverty, and framing it as a human rights issue (BCCIC, 2017; Dignity for All, 2015);

integrating the national anti-poverty framework into what already exists within the provinces or territories and complementing existing strategies (Dignity for All, 2015);

making federal government spending for poverty eradication more holistic to encompass the wide range of determinants that affect Indigenous people's health, including housing, child welfare, education, employment, transportation and food security (Dignity for all, 2015);

framing the national housing/homelessness strategy (then under development), as a human rights issue (BCCIC, 2017; Dignity for All, 2015), with increased accountability and collaboration, improved shelter standards; measures to address capacity challenges; increased housing options for the homeless; and incorporation of a concerted public health response to alcohol and drug use (Patrick, 2014);

developing Indigenous-specific SDG targets and indicators, including targets on community poverty, food security, health and well-being, education, gender equality, water, and sanitation (UNPFII, 2016);

developing an Indigenous-specific strategy to focus on the structural or root causes of violence against Indigenous women and the specific challenges they face in dealing with, or leaving, abusive situations;

including self-determination (the right to make decisions on activities, health, and well-being) and self-governance in the measurement of indicators of poverty among Indigenous Peoples (BCCIC, 2017);

ensuring the federal government implements the UNDRIP, as adopted in 2016 (BCCIC, 2017), especially sections related to Indigenous Peoples' right to self-governance;

developing effective strategies to address the high school dropout rates among Indigenous youth;

making investments to improve educational infrastructure on reserve to levels that are equitable to those off reserve;

addressing the fairness of judicial hearings and the over-representation of Indigenous Peoples in prisons by investing in Indigenous judicial systems and correctional services that offer a holistic approach to the reintegration of offenders;

increasing social assistance to northern and remote Indigenous communities;

increasing federal spending to address food insecurity for First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples;

harnessing the beneficial gains of partnership within and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, governments, education systems, industries, and others to ensure sustainability; and

implementing all of the 94 TRC Calls to Action.

Over the past four years, many actions have taken place at both the federal and provincial/territorial levels to advance progress on these recommendations. To start, the federal government implemented a national poverty reduction strategy, framed as a human rights issue and developed through consultation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals and communities. The strategy adopts a strengths-based, distinctions-based, and holistic approach that encompasses the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and emphasizes working in partnership with provincial and territorial governments and communities. The national strategy also adopts an official measure of poverty; however, this measure continues to be based solely on income and thus may not fully capture how poverty is experienced by Indigenous Peoples across Canada. Some progress has also been made at the provincial/territorial level to address poverty, as all provinces and territories have now implemented their own strategies.[48] The federal government's anti-poverty framework complements their approaches.

In terms of housing issues, the Government of Canada has since implemented its first ever National Housing Strategy and a separate, but integrated, Homelessness Strategy. These strategies also frame housing as a human rights issue. The National Housing Strategy includes commitments to invest heavily on a wide range of housing and homelessness initiatives across Canada, as well as develop distinctions-based Indigenous housing strategies. The new Homelessness Strategy provides funding for a wide range of community-based programs and other measures aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness (ESDC, 2020). While it does not increase shelter standards, the Homelessness Strategy does offer a wide range of housing options, addresses capacity challenges, and encompasses a public health response to alcohol and drug use.

There have also been some innovative solutions for improving housing on reserve that address a significant barrier – the stipulation that land on reserve be held in trust by the Crown – to investment as embedded in the

Indian Act. Examples include the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) insured loans for buying, building, and renovating single-family homes and multi-unit rental properties on reserve for those who have a certificate of possession or been granted use of the land by the First Nation and meet the approved lender's minimum requirements (CMHC, 2018). There have also been similar housing loan and/or renovation programs offered by the Bank of Montreal (BMO) Financial Group and Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), though there may be additional requirements that the lot be serviced by roads, hydro, water, or septic tanks (BMO, n.d., RBC, 2021). As a result of these various strategies and initiatives, considerable progress has been made in the provision of more and better-quality housing for Indigenous populations; though, significant gaps remain in terms of the proportion of Indigenous households living in overcrowded and poor-quality housing compared to the non-Indigenous population.

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[48] British Columbia was the most recent province to implement a poverty reduction strategy. See Government of British Columbia (2019b).

This revised 2024 edition of the SDGs and Indigenous Peoples report presents considerable progress made over the past four years towards achieving equality for Indigenous women, including elimination of sex-based discrimination from the *Indian Act*; incorporation of gender into governance structures, policies, and accountability mechanisms; creation of Indigenous women's advisory committees and boards; development and action plans to address Indigenous and gender-based violence; and implementation of recommendations from the NIMMIWG. However, it also highlights ongoing challenges to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The federal government's strategy for addressing gender-based violence does not focus specifically on the structural or root causes of violence against Indigenous women or the specific challenges they face in dealing with abusive situations. Advocates continue to push for a unique Indigenous strategy to address gender-based violence.

This edition of the SDGs report also highlights other progress made on gender equality and social inclusion for Indigenous women. Most provincial/territorial governments have cancelled the discriminatory practice of issuing birth alerts in hospitals. Moreover, Indigenous women are achieving greater levels of educational attainment, income, and employment, and their representation in decision-making bodies and in leadership roles is increasing. Nevertheless, this report demonstrates that progress has not gone far enough in achieving parity.

The last four years have also seen a tremendous push to advance self-determination for Indigenous Peoples through a variety of mechanisms, including Comprehensive Land Claim Agreements, Self-Government Agreements, and First Nation Land Management Agreements. The federal government followed up with its commitment to the UNDRIP by adopting the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and signing numerous agreements that emphasize Indigenous self-determination and governance with selected Indigenous communities as well as First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples regionally and nationally, across Indigenous governments and within specific sectors such as child welfare, education, health, and land management. Federal initiatives that promote self-determination are supported by enhanced efforts to address inequitable gaps in funding for health, education, and social services. However, self-governance is yet to be included in the measurement of other SDG indicators among Indigenous Peoples.

The past four years have also seen improvements in education, employment, and income for Indigenous Peoples generally (with the exception of some interruption during the COVID-19 pandemic), as well as in Indigenous students' educational attainment, though further work is needed to close educational gaps, particularly at the university level (Louie & Gereluk, 2021; OECD, 2020). The federal government has made significant investments to address inequitable access to quality education in Indigenous communities, especially on First Nations reserves, and has implemented a new funding model to ensure that education

in First Nations schools is sustainable, responds to potential cost changes, and is comparable to that of provincial education systems. While these policy and funding changes have the potential to help close the gap in educational attainment for First Nations students, additional governance supports may be needed to make long-lasting impacts to student outcomes (White-Eye, 2019).

Indigenous Peoples continue to be over-represented in the child welfare, justice, and correctional systems. The movement towards Indigenous self-determination in child welfare is one promising step; however, over-incarceration of Indigenous people continues, due, in part, to a failure to address upstream determinants

(i.e., poverty, substance abuse, trauma, etc.), as well as systemic issues that are contributing to the unfair treatment of Indigenous inmates (OCI, 2020). With the election of three successive Liberal governments, there have been significant increases in federal spending to address some of these upstream determinants. Systemic change is still needed though to ensure that child welfare, justice, and correctional systems are culturally appropriate and sensitive (AHF, 2005; OCI, 2015, 2020). While efforts are underway to reform the organizational culture of the RCMP to address systemic racism and discrimination, the adequacy and effectiveness of these efforts and the extent to which similar reforms are being undertaken within other regional

and municipal police forces, the courts, and provincial/federal jails and prisons, is difficult to assess.

The past four years have also seen progress towards reconciliation. The 94 Calls to Action identified by the TRC (2015) continue to be implemented by all levels of government and throughout the public and private sectors. Progress on reconciliation is most notable in relation to Indigenous engagement and partnerships between settler allies and First Nations peoples, Inuit, and Métis peoples, organizations, and communities. While not without some challenges, there are now well-established norms and expectations regarding the meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making processes on issues

Careful consideration must be given to ensure that Indigenous voices in decision-making processes represent all segments of the population who are affected by decisions, and that Indigenous Peoples are given equal weight to non-Indigenous voices, regardless of whether the decision-making occurs at the local, regional, provincial/territorial, national, or international levels.

that affect them, occurring at all levels and across all sectors. Nevertheless, there are still occasions where Indigenous voices are marginalized due to power imbalances and the structures in place to represent and hear Indigenous people. Careful consideration must be given to ensure that Indigenous voices in decision-making processes represent all segments of the population who are affected by decisions, and that Indigenous voices are given equal weight to non-Indigenous voices, regardless of whether the decision-making occurs at the local, regional, provincial/territorial, national, or international levels. It is particularly critical that Indigenous voices are adequately represented in decision-making on broader issues that extend

beyond Indigenous borders, such as on climate change and natural resource development issues, as decisions made on these broader scales are likely to disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples.

Finally, the previous version of this report recommended the development of efficient data systems to track progress on achieving the SDG goals (UNPFII, 2016). This required building capacity within Indigenous organizations, the standardization of terms used in data collection to ensure transparency and comparability among Indigenous communities and across Canada, and the establishment of a centralized national system or website to highlight Canada's progress in

meeting the SDGs. Some progress has been made on Indigenous governance over health data and the sharing of Indigenous data across jurisdictions (Nickerson, 2017). However, there continues to be a lack of consistency in the use of Indigenous identifiers in data collection and the standardization of terms to ensure consistent data collection, and no centralized national system to highlight Canada's progress in meeting the SDGs. There is also much work that still needs to be done on the development of Indigenous-specific targets and indicators, with much of this work still in its infancy.

New recommendations to build on progress to achieve SDG targets

This report highlights some previous recommendations that continue to be relevant, as well as offers new recommendations that have emerged, on how to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are not left behind as Canada works to achieve the SDG targets. These include:

- Utilize multi-dimensional measures of poverty more consistently, such as the community well-being index, the human development index, or the multidimensional poverty index, across First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and non-Indigenous populations to allow for comparisons across and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations nationally and internationally.

- Continue to address jurisdictional issues for Métis and non-status First Nations, which have created an inequitable service provision environment.

- Adapt policies to facilitate local and sustainable food production and remove barriers to engaging in and earning an income from these types of activities through actions such as providing support for hunters to enable the sale of harvested foods in local markets (Loukes et al., 2021; Pal et al., 2013); establishing a regulatory framework that would enable public procurement of country and traditional foods (NIEDB, 2019b); and recognizing land rights and the fully realizing the right to self-determination to facilitate Indigenous community-based food sovereignty initiatives (Dietitians of Canada, 2017; Klassen, 2016).

- Continue to develop rural, and northern Indigenous housing strategy to address the large service gap for the majority of Indigenous people who are not living on First Nations reserves (Indigenous Housing Caucus of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2020).

- Reduce socio-economic gaps by developing and implementing strategies for improving socio-economic infrastructure in Indigenous communities, creating jobs, and addressing barriers within the education sector, such as limited school and educational opportunities in rural and remote Indigenous communities, inadequate internet connectivity, and limited integration of Indigenous knowledges, pedagogy, and assessment methods in mainstream education.

- Implement a robust system of governance supports for First Nation schools, such as developing research and data systems, using traditional knowledge keepers as teachers, developing First Nation education learning resources, and creating highly contextualized teacher training/certification centres (White-Eye, 2019).

- Adopt a rights-based approach to protect, respect, and fulfill the rights of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people in decision-making bodies on matters that affect their health and well-being, and ensure that Canada not only meets its fiduciary duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous Peoples but ensures that Indigenous women are not further marginalized (Koutouki et al., 2018). Such an approach might involve implementing legislation and policies shaped by human rights principles to ensure women are fully, equally, and meaningfully included in decision-making processes, as well as developing standards or quotas for women's representation on boards, implementing measures to ensure compliance, and funding programs to enhance women's capacity and leadership skills

- Develop an Indigenous-specific strategy to focus on the structural or root causes of violence against Indigenous women and gender-diverse people and the specific challenges they face in dealing with, or leaving, abusive situations.

- Continue to expand access to Indigenous community-led models of maternity care in locations across Canada.

- Undertake major systemic and structural reforms to address social and health inequalities in services provision, including shifting focus from responding to the needs of individual children to encompassing social and community contexts; implementing Indigenous led, designed, and delivered services; and creating long-term sustainable funding for health and social services and programs (Gerlach et al., 2020).

- Continue to utilize more holistic approaches that incorporate Indigenous worldviews and practices, and foster self-determination in the areas of child welfare, policing, and correctional justice, including investments in Indigenous judicial systems and correctional services that offer a holistic approach to the reintegration of offenders.

- Improve cultural safety for Indigenous people interacting with mainstream systems, including child welfare, health, justice, and corrections, through a review and evaluation across government to identify and address ongoing discriminatory ideologies, policies, and practices; system-wide implementation of cultural safety training; and use of interpreters and Indigenous legal representatives.

- Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies within health services provision, child welfare systems, police, justice, and corrections systems to enhance equity and fairness for Indigenous Peoples and monitor differences in treatment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people

- Continue to encourage greater self-determination over lands and resources and develop and monitor indicators to measure progress related to Indigenous land rights and ownership of land.

- Revise outdated operations and maintenance funding formulas for First Nations water systems on reserve, fix the salary gap that has contributed to problems in retaining qualified water system operators, and develop and implement a regulatory regime to ensure access to safe drinking water in all First Nations communities (OAGC, 2021).

- Continue to address issues related to data collection and data quality, including: the use of unlinked data, potential misclassification and under-reporting of Indigenous data, lack of Indigenous identifiers in data collection, lack of disaggregated data across selected Indigenous populations and demographic variables, lack of regular nation-wide surveillance on specific health issues, the absence of culturally-appropriate indicators that capture the realities and strengths of Indigenous populations, lack of monitoring of trends in all regions across Canada, and the need for Indigenous data governance.

- Develop Indigenous-specific SDG targets and indicators, including targets on community poverty, food security, access to traditional foods, health and well-being, education, gender equality, water, sanitation, and access to health and social services.

- Finally, continue to support community-specific and culturally relevant solutions to improving conditions for Indigenous people ensuring they have the fiscal capacity and legal autonomy to make needed decisions, based on their inherent right to self-determination.

Without this recognition of the right to self-determination, solutions will continue to be colonially imposed and not sustainable, despite good intentions.

(Yesno, 2019)

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of the 2030 SDGs Agenda is to leave no one behind. While the Agenda is comprehensive and addresses many of the issues faced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada, it is clear that this cannot be achieved without focusing on the unique issues affecting Indigenous Peoples that are rooted in colonialism. Poverty has been identified as a recurring theme that has led to inequality within the country, necessitating poverty alleviation strategies that are equally comprehensive and adaptable to address the various situations that lead to and result from poverty. As demonstrated throughout this report, much progress has been made regarding socio-economic inequalities and inequitable access to public services for Indigenous populations; yet considerable gaps remain between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. There is also concern that some of this progress may be reversed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much work remains to identify Indigenous-specific targets and monitor progress on indicators to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are not left behind in the sustainability agenda.

Canada has notably been a frontrunner on environmental conservation. As this report highlights, issues on environmental conservation and development must be critically addressed and in alignment with the rights of Indigenous Peoples. International documents like the UNDRIP and national documents like the TRC's report and recommendations can help guide respectful and meaningful discourse nationally with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Over the next seven years of the 2030 SDG agenda, civil society will continue to be an active force in monitoring and reporting on Canada's progress to achieve the SDGs. However, a major drawback with this Agenda continues to be the silence it maintains on specific Indigenous issues like self-determination and governance, Indigenous land rights, and ownership. These issues are the foundations for inequality and poverty among Indigenous Peoples and failing to address them renders strategies to alleviate poverty and inequities ineffective. Indigenous communities require not only the fiscal capacity to make decisions that will improve conditions for its members, but also the legal autonomy to do so without interference from colonial bodies of powers. Without this recognition of the right to self-determination, solutions will continue to be colonially imposed and not sustainable, despite good intentions (Yesno, 2019).

In Canada, the legal precedence of a nation-to-nation agreement is key for effective negotiations and the development of partnerships to achieve this Agenda. Progress has been made in this regard, as engagement and partnerships with Indigenous Peoples are now a well-established norm for addressing key issues of joint importance. The maintenance of these relationships and accountability will be key to seeing this progress through to completion and ensuring meaningful achievement of the SDGs as it relates to Indigenous Peoples.

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