



Briefing Note Submitted to House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women
System of Shelters and Transition Houses Serving Women and Children Affected by Violence
against Women and Intimate Partner Violence

Pauktuutit is the national representative organization of Inuit women in Canada. Pauktuutit leads and supports Inuit women through work that ranges from advocacy and policy development to community projects to address their unique interests and priorities for the social, cultural, political and economic betterment of Inuit women, their families and communities.

At the rate of 14 times the national average, violence is a preventable leading cause of morbidity and mortality in Inuit women (and girls). In 2014, 75% of victims who reported incidents of IPV in Canada's northern territories were Indigenous and 93% of these individuals suffered the most severe forms of spousal violence that is having been beaten, choked, threatened with a weapon or sexually assaulted.¹ Université Laval researchers in partnership with Saturviit Inuit Women of Nunavik found that 74% of the 108 Inuit women surveyed in seven Nunavik (Northern Quebec) communities had experienced violence in the home, and almost half (46%) had experienced sexual assault.² A 2012 Statistics Canada report found that rates of sexual offences against children and youth were highest in the territories — the Northwest Territories and Nunavut recorded the highest rates in Canada.³

Across Inuit Nunangat, most communities are without specialized counselling and support services to address unresolved intergenerational trauma, which is a major mental health issue among Inuit. Other contemporary social conditions such as inadequate and overcrowded housing, high rates of unemployment and poverty, low educational attainment, food insecurity and more contemporary problems such as substance abuse and the highest rates of suicide in the country have contributed to Inuit regions having the highest rates of violence in the country.

In 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed to gender equality for all women in Canada. The federal government also committed to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Specifically, the Minister of Status of Women Canada, Myriam Monsef, was specifically mandated to ensure that no one fleeing domestic violence is left without a place to turn, by growing and maintaining Canada's network of shelters and transition houses.

¹ Statistics Canada. 2015. *Criminal Victimization in Canada, 2014*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. Ottawa. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14241-eng.pdf> (March 5, 2018).

² Saturviit Inuit Women's Association of Nunavik & Université Laval. (2015). *Bring hope and restore peace: A study report on the life and concerns of Inuit women of Nunavik*. Retrieved from Saturviit Inuit Women's Association of Nunavik website: <http://www.saturviit.ca/women-concerns/bring-hope-and-restore-peace/>.

³ Statistics Canada. 2017. *Police-reported sexual offences against children and youth in Canada, 2012*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. Ottawa. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14008-eng.pdf?st=sBHboxzZ> (March 7, 2018).



Today, most of the Inuit population—totaling approximately 65,000 people—live in 52 communities spread across Inuit Nunangat.⁴ Inuit consider their homeland to be integral to their culture and their way of life. The Inuit homeland encompasses 35 per cent of Canada’s landmass and 50 per cent of its coastline. Inuit live mostly in small, isolated, fly-in communities of fewer than 1,000 people. The flow of Inuit into urban spaces, particularly women, has been increasing steadily over the past few decades in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, in 2016, over 17,690 Inuit live outside of Inuit Nunangat⁵.

The median age for Canada’s aboriginal population is 28, compared to 41 for non-aboriginal population.⁶ Inuit are the youngest group with a median age of 23 followed by First Nations at 26 and Métis at 31.⁷ Nunavut has the youngest and fastest growing population in the country.⁸ Thirty-three percent of the population is under the age of 14 and more than half of Nunavut’s population is under the age of 25.⁹ Like Nunavut, 57% of the population in Nunavik was under 25 in 2014.¹⁰ Given that youth are the largest faction of the Inuit population, it is essential that services, programs and resources strongly consider the needs of this particular demographic.

Statistics Canada data shows that in 2016, over half (51.7%) of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat live in crowded housing compared to 8.5% percent of non-Indigenous Canadians.¹¹ Severe overcrowding, substandard homes, and a lack of affordable and suitable housing option has left many Inuit communities and families at risk of becoming homeless in one of the harshest climates in the world. Having access to appropriate and affordable housing is crucial for women seeking safety from violence.

⁴ Inuit Nunangat includes the communities located in the four Inuit regions: Nunatsiavut (northern coastal Labrador), Nunavik (Northern Quebec), the Territory of Nunavut and the Inuvialuit region of the Northwest Territories. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/ref/dict/pop149-eng.cfm>

⁵ Statistics Canada. (2017). Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 census. Retrieved November 1, 2018, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>.

⁶ Statistics Canada. (2015). Aboriginal peoples: Fact sheet for Canada. Retrieved November 7, 2018, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-656-x/89-656-x2015001-eng.htm>.

⁷ Statistics Canada. (2015). Aboriginal peoples in Canada: First Nations people, Metis and Inuit national household survey 2011. Retrieved November 1, 2018, from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Government of Nunavut. (2017). Nunavut crime prevention strategy. Retrieved from: [http://assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/TD-302-4\(3\)-EN-Nunavut-Crime-Prevention-Strategy.PDF](http://assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/TD-302-4(3)-EN-Nunavut-Crime-Prevention-Strategy.PDF)

¹⁰ Statistics Canada. (2015). Aboriginal peoples in Canada: First Nations people, Metis and Inuit national household survey 2011. Retrieved November 1, 2018, from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm>.

¹¹ Statistics Canada. (2017). The housing condition of Aboriginal people in Canada. Retrieved October 14, 2018, from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016021/98-200-x2016021-eng.cfm?wbdisable=true>.



Despite Inuit Nunangat experiencing the highest rates of violence in the country, greater than 70 per cent of the 52 Inuit communities across Inuit Nunangat do not have a safe shelter for women, and often the homes of family and friends are overcrowded due to the lack of available and affordable housing. Crisis and support services, counselling services, housing support services, and transition support services are also extraordinarily limited or cease to exist.

As a result, those experiencing violence and abuse in their homes, often have no place in their community to seek safety. A plane ticket to another community may cost thousands of dollars, which is out of reach for most, particularly in times of crisis. This can mean a woman may have to plead with local social services workers to be flown to another community to seek safety. There have been too many cases in Inuit Nunangat when the lack of access to safe alternatives has led to the loss of life. The lack of access to safe alternatives is a national crisis and violation of human rights.

Randomly under-funded programs and services are offered without being sustainable, Inuit-specific, or consistent between communities. Many positions in the North for service providers in the fields of health, mental health, and social work are left vacant. For the approximately 15 existing safe shelters and transition homes, very high occupancy rates combined with daily challenges to meet operating and human resource requirements contribute to high staff turnover rates due to burnout, lack of peer support and often inadequate training because of geographic isolation and limited financial resources for training. There is often a lack of dedicated long-term funding since funding is often project-based and time-limited. This makes sustainability a continual challenge. It must also be noted that there is no second-stage housing in Inuit Nunangat, which can be crucial in a woman's efforts to re-establish a life without violence. Therefore, when violence does happen, Inuit women are regularly met with a critical lack of services and support to help them escape violence as well as recover from its impacts.

With nowhere to seek safety, the reality is that many Inuit victims of violence require medevacs to receive emergency and rehabilitative services out of territory, which adds pressure and costs to already struggling provincial and territorial health services. The lack of safety, in large part, due to inadequate shelters and housing options, which often forces women to move thousands of kilometers from their traditional homelands to other communities or urban areas. Living in a southern Canadian city can be tremendously isolating for Inuit. Without the proper culturally appropriate and relevant supports and services in the south to overcome the wide-ranging effects of trauma, many women remain unsafe and can experience other related challenges that too often lead to increased vulnerability to ongoing violence and abuse. The human cost over the lifespan can be immense.

Last, while the provinces and territories are responsible for housing and safe shelters for women, Indigenous Services Canada provides operational funding to shelters on-reserve, and also reimburses costs for off-reserve shelter services used by First Nations peoples ordinarily resident on-reserve. Since Inuit communities are not reserves, shelters serving Inuit women in the Arctic are disallowed from accessing this funding. This specifically excludes Inuit women and girls from developing and accessing shelters in the North. Barring Inuit from accessing shelter



funding contravenes UNDRIP Article 22 which declares that: “States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.” Just as the Federal Government funds shelters on reserves, so must they fund shelters for Inuit communities.

Every Inuit woman and girl deserves to live free from the fear of violence in her home and community. The following recommendations are offered to improve Inuit women and girls’ access to the requisite supports and services they need to help them live safely and rebuild their lives.

Funding

- 1) Reverse the Government of Canada’s policy that excludes Inuit from accessing federal shelter funding through the Family Violence Prevention Plan (FVPP).
 - The measurement of Federal Government funding for shelters in Inuit communities must be determined by Inuit and not based on southern instruments.
- 2) Ensure that Inuit have access to secure, adequate and long-term shelter and transition housing funding, and that shelter policies and programs are responsive to the priority needs of Inuit women as they identify them.
- 3) All shelters require the following: ongoing, reliable funding including operations and maintenance; and, increased capacity for staff recruitment, retention, professional development and support.
- 4) Increase operating funding to the existing women’s emergency shelter programs. Recognizing the high staff burnout rate among frontline workers in Inuit Nunangat, an enhancement in funding may help to prevent staff shortage by ensuring that staff have access to adequate remuneration, training and resources. Staff shortages and vacancies, sometimes for long periods, place great demands on existing staff stretching services to the limits and causing long waitlists. Burnout affects the quality and continuity of services being offered.
- 5) Inuit face a chronic lack of mental health, counselling and support services across Inuit Nunangat as well as vastly inadequate Inuit-specific services in the south. Significantly enhance adequate, long-term funding is for Inuit-specific, trauma-informed programs that offer support and healing to in survivors, their children and the perpetrators of violence.



Shelter Needs

- 6) Convene a national consultation with Inuit women to co-develop an action plan to address the dire lack of emergency shelters, transition and second-stage housing for Inuit.
- 7) Establish Inuit-focused shelters in urban centres equipped with culturally appropriate services.
- 8) Every community should have a shelter or safe house with at least two full-time staff, one being an Inuk counsellor.
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Services, Programs and Resources

- 10) Inuit women and girls must have access to high quality, culturally-safe, prevention, intervention and postvention services. These services should be enhanced through the coordination of multidisciplinary teams to provide safety and wellbeing. Supports must be community-driven and tailored to Inuit women's specific needs. They should be comprehensive including access to mental health services, life skills and employment training programs.
- 11) Services for women experiencing violence must extend beyond those provided as an immediate response to an incident. Develop a robust continuum of crisis intervention services and long-term support for victims and offenders of family violence across Inuit Nunangat, including: women's shelters, sexual assault services, counselling services, coordinated justice response programs, family violence networks and treatment programs to reduce and stop the cycle of family violence.
- 12) Communities must have after-hours services available to support women and children facing violence and abuse since a significant proportion of family violence incidents attended by police occur after-hours¹².

¹² After-hours refers to the period outside of the traditional business hours of 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, noting that normal operating hours for some agencies may extend beyond these hours. After-hours includes the period between 5pm and 9am on weekdays, all hours on weekends (between 5pm Friday and 9am Monday) and public holidays.



- 13) Enhance the establishment of clear referral pathways between police and agencies providing after-hours family violence crisis response.
- 14) Increase women and children's access to cultural and gender-specific supports, including health professionals, counsellors, respected elders/community members, child abuse specialists, pediatricians, etc.
- 15) Services must be readily accessible to Inuit and based in their own culture and language.
- 16) Enhance the provision and use of telehealth supports such as psychiatry, psychological supports and other specialized services.
- 17) Ensure access to specialized services for survivors of child sexual abuse by addressing physical and sexual violence toward Inuit women and children as an urgent public health priority.
- 18) Strengthen linkages and networks among agencies service providers, and enhance inter-agency cooperation, collaboration, coordination and integration.
- 19) In consultation with Inuit women, identify and develop plans to reduce service gaps.
- 20) Significantly increase access to addictions programs including residential counselling services and supports.
- 21) Create multi-purpose healing facilities in communities inclusive of after-care and long-term support for victims and offenders and integrate elders and Inuit values in service delivery.
- 22) Establish and maintain regional residential and long-term healing centres.
- 23) Provide culturally relevant ongoing trauma, grief and loss counselling.
- 24) Treatment facilities must incorporate the following: Inuit cultural safety, Inuit healing practices, Inuit counsellors and elders.
- 25) Expand access to sustained child and youth-centered community-based support services and refuge accommodations.



- 26) Develop ongoing and long-term public education and awareness-raising multi-media campaigns targeted at young people, men and women focused on eliminating violence against women and girls. It is crucial that all campaigns are culturally-specific to Inuit.
- 27) The education system should take a lead role preventing violence against women and girls by promoting respectful relationships and gender equality.

Training

- 28) Increase mandatory cultural safety and cultural competency training among non-Inuit service providers to ensure that they have a broad understanding of Inuit culture and are, therefore, able to incorporate it into their practices and policies.
- 29) Existing mental health and wellness counsellors in every Inuit region should receive training to communicate in Inuktitut.
- 30) Enhance culturally appropriate counselling and support services by increasing greater access to training at the community level for Inuit.
- 31) All shelter system actors should undergo mandatory training on their responsibilities as it relates to ensuring that children are protected from child sexual abuse.
- 32) Ensure that all service providers at community, regional and national levels understand the different forms of violence against women and girls; their responsibilities addressing the issue; and how to work with others in the system.

Housing

- 33) Responsible governments and authorities must make every effort to provide funds for the creation of affordable housing.
- 34) Advance opportunities for Inuit, particularly women, to have direct leadership in the development of housing policy and programs, decisions, planning and administration.
 - When looking to address the long-standing housing crisis, Inuit women must be at the forefront when looking at solutions. Inuit women have distinct needs as it relates to housing as they often experience unique barriers to socio-economic participation and are frequently the predominate among caregivers of the elderly and children.

Research

- 35) Expand access to sustained child and youth-centered community-based support services and refuge accommodations.



- 36) Advance evidence on the prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among Inuit, including in Inuit Nunangat and in the south, and how interventions can be adapted for the Inuit cultural context.
- 37) Research must explore Inuit women's experience of homelessness and housing insecurity in both Inuit Nunangat and in the rest of Canada. Given the extreme inadequacy of housing in Inuit Nunangat, and the corresponding harmful health, social, and economic consequences, women and their children are often forced to contend with hidden and absolute homelessness. An increasing number of Inuit are moving south where they may also experience social, economic and housing problems increasing their vulnerability to violence and mistreatment.