

Economic Security of Women in Canada

SUBMITTED BY THE FIRST NATIONS WOMEN 'S COUNCIL ON
ECONOMIC SECURITY

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Alberta's First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security thanks the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women for the opportunity to present on Indigenous women's economic security on June 6, 2017. Further to the presentation provided by council chair, Tracy Lee, and council member Marlene Poitras, the council wishes to highlight additional information for the committee's consideration. As the council holds a seat for an Inuit woman, the council is including statistics on Inuit women.

Implementing the principles and objectives of *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action* while respecting Treaty rights are important pieces of working towards reconciliation and greater economic security for Indigenous women.

According to Statistics Canada, between 2006 and 2010 the First Nations female population with registered Indian status grew by 14% while the number of First Nations females without status increased by 62%. The Inuit female population grew by 18% compared to 5% for non-Aboriginal females.¹ Indigenous women are the youngest and fastest growing segment of the population, yet they continue to face barriers to achieving economic security.

More and more women are furthering their education. Information provided by the First Nations Information Governance Centre from its First Nations Regional Health Survey (phase 3) states First Nations women who completed a postsecondary qualification is 45%.² Statistics Canada reports 36% for Inuit women have post-secondary qualifications.³ As most Indigenous women pursue their education as mature students, many of these women are raising families and going to school. More child care and subsidized housing would serve as additional support for the women who are trying to build better lives for their families.

The few job opportunities on-reserve create pressure for women to leave their communities and their support network to seek employment elsewhere. Institutional racism and western interviewing practices that encourage self-promotion serve as additional barriers to economic security. The employment rate for First Nations women on-reserve was 35% in 2011 compared with 50% for First Nations women who live off-reserve. Employment for Inuit women ranges between 44% and 56% depending on where they reside.⁴

The number of Indigenous women entrepreneurs is growing, representing 69% of Aboriginal-owned businesses, yet the Aboriginal Business Development Program Survey reports only 31% of funding went to Indigenous women business owners.⁵ Access to capital continues to be an issue. As most Indigenous-owned businesses focus on their local communities and provide employment opportunities, the council recommends preferential procurement for First Nations businesses before outsourcing. All funding

¹ Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women, Statistics Canada, February 23, 2016

² <http://fnigc.ca/rhs-field/new-phase-landmark-first-nations-health-survey-launches-first-nations-communities-across>

³ Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women, Statistics Canada, February 23, 2016

⁴ Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women, Statistics Canada, February 23, 2016

⁵ Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, Promise and Prosperity, The Aboriginal Business Survey,

dollars allocated to First Nations should remain with First Nations with their input as to how funding should be disbursed.

In many First Nations cultures, the notion of gender equality is at odds with traditional knowledge of man and woman as equals. Both had important roles that kept our people strong. Traditional roles become even more fluid in Inuit society. Colonialism and government legislation foisted a paternal and patriarchal world-view on Indigenous people which has marginalized First Nations women and their contributions to community. Efforts to eliminate sex-based discrimination in the *Indian Act* must continue, as Indigenous women continue to suffer from these discriminatory practices.

According to a Statistics Canada report on Women and the Criminal Justice System, Aboriginal women in Alberta face higher homicide rates than in any other province; 7.17 Aboriginal female homicides per 100,000 people compared to 0.97 homicides among non-Aboriginal women.⁶ Aboriginal women are reported to be almost three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to report they have been a victim of domestic violence in the past five years.⁷

Many First Nations and Inuit women suffer from mental health issues and addictions stemming from intergenerational trauma brought about by government actions such as residential schools and the 60's Scoop. Jurisdictional disputes must be overcome to ensure equal access to treatment and care on and off-reserve. As culture is key to healing, the council recommends that our respected and Spiritual Elders and natural healers be equitably compensated and incorporated into the mental health and education systems.

A University of Lethbridge research project on public perceptions of Indigenous women tells a story of two narratives: How mainstream society views Indigenous women and how Indigenous women view themselves. While mainstream perceptions are that Indigenous women are victims, living in dangerous places, impoverished and have few allies, this is not how Indigenous women see themselves. The research project says, "We Indigenous women are resilient people. We have come from so little and have achieved so much. We lean on each other for support and when we band together we can achieve great things."⁸

First Nations and Inuit women and girls deserve equal access to opportunities to participate fully in the Canadian economy. At the same time, Canadians must respect our Indigenous world view of economic security differs from western constructs. Collective success, reciprocity, sustainability and how we care for each other is the foundation of Indigenous women's economic security. The First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security appreciates governments' efforts to seek input from Indigenous women. The council looks forward to outcomes from the committee's work.

The First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security reports to Alberta's Minister of Indigenous Relations and is responsible for providing strategic advice and recommendations to the Government of Alberta, other government councils and interested stakeholders with the goal of strengthening the economic security of First Nations and Inuit women.

⁶ Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report, Women and the Criminal Justice System, June 6, 2017

⁷ Family Violence Hurts Everyone, a Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta, 2012

⁸ Literature Review and Analysis of Public Attitudes Towards Indigenous Women in Alberta, Dr. J. Lauren Johnson and Dr. Elaine Greidanus, 2016

