

Downtown Eastside Women's Centre



WRITTEN CLOSING SUBMISSIONS for the DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE WOMEN'S CENTER

Presented to the National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

for the Written Closing Submissions, December 14, 2018

PRESENTED BY:

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Unceded territory of xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh and Səlilwətaʔl nations

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NOTE: *The page limit for written closing submissions set by the National Inquiry for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls means that our full submission, which is over 360 pages, will not form part of the public record of the National Inquiry. As a result, DEWC will be independently releasing our full submission as an independent report in early 2019. Our written closing submission provided here is an extended executive summary and recommendations from our whole report.*

List of Contributors

Indigenous women survivors in the DTES and members of DEWC:

Eight Indigenous women who prefer to remain anonymous

Amber Robinson, Haisla, in the DTES for 13 years

Annette Morris Misjee, Carrier, in the DTES for 30 years

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Ashley Sleight, Siksika, in the DTES for 2 years

Audrey Hill, Haida, in the DTES for 20 years

Bernice Cristine Sinclair, Pinaymootang, in the DTES for 18 years

Beverly Wesley, Slate Falls, in the DTES for 7 years

Bobbi Baker, Squamish, in the DTES for 1 year

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Brigette Lopez, Cheslatta Carrier, in the DTES for 7 years

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Carmaine Annette Cardinal, Saddle Lake Cree, in the DTES for 2.5 years

Catherine Moses, Makwa Sahgaiehcan Cree, in the DTES for 17 years

Cheri Bullshields, Blood Tribe, in the DTES for 2 months

Cheryl Lynn Bird, Little Black River Ojibway, in the DTES for 4 months

Chilli Bean, Shushwap, in the DTES for 30 years

Christine Stewart, Haisla

Cindy H, Cross Lake, in the DTES for 3 years

Corinne Ducharme, Cree, in the DTES for 44 years

Crystal Lynn, Woodlands Cree, in the DTES for 14 years

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Danita Lynn Bird, Ojibway, in the DTES for 25 years
Darlene Joe, Chehalis, in the DTES for 29 years
Dawn Cook, Haida, in the DTES for 30 years
Dawna Bird, Cote, in the DTES for 30 years
Debbie Miller, West Moberly, in the DTES for 32 years
Debbie Schuabach, Metis, in the DTES for 20 years
Deborah Chartrand, Ojibway and Cree Saulteau, in the DTES for 43 years
Debra Leo, Homalco, in the DTES for 25 years
Edna Edgar, Kitsoo, in the DTES for 37 years
Elaine Bissonnette, Cree, in the DTES for 10 years
Elaine Durocher, Métis, in the DTES for 16 years
Ericka Michell, Carrier Sekani
Eva Kovacs, D'Nai Whitehorse, in the DTES for 42 years
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Gwen Paul, Sechelt, in the DTES for 35 years
Helen Worm, Cree, in the DTES for 31 years
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Jan Three Suns, Siksika, in the DTES for 20 years
Jennifer Azak, Nisga'a, just got to the DTES
Jennifer Humcitt, Heiltsuk, in the DTES for 23 years
Joleen Hansen, Tl'azt'en, in the DTES for 10 years
Jolene, Carrier Fort St. James, in the DTES for 10 years
Karen Boyd, Carrier Fort St. James, in the DTES for 24 years
Katherine Pearl Cooper, Tsimshian, in the DTES for 54 years
Kathleen Sarpi, Whitesand - Ojibway, in the DTES for 1.5 months
Kayla Fox, Sweetgrass First Nation
Kim Baptiste, Heiltsuk, in the DTES for 5 years
Lana David Collins, Metis, in the DTES for 8 years
Larissa Healey, Peguis

Leah Bullshields, Blood Tribe, in the DTES for 2 months
Lillian Wycotte, Alkalidabe, in the DTES for 44 years
Loretta Louie, Nisga'a, in the DTES for 46 years
Lori Pascal, Shushwap, in the DTES for 6 years
Louisa Starr, Kitasoo, in the DTES for 30 years
Mabel Todd, Carrier Fort St. James, in the DTES for 58 years
Maggie Hussin, Gull Bay First Nation, in the DTES for 30 years
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Mary-Ann Azac, Nisga'a, in the DTES for 27 years
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Michelle Oleman, St'at'imc, in the DTES for 10 years
Myra Williams, Skatin, in the DTES for 20 years
Pearl Baptiste, Sauteau, in the DTES for 30 years
Penni Wells, Haida, in the DTES for 64 years
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Remona Charlie, Cree-Métis
Reta Blind, Cree, in the DTES for 34 years
Rhonda Watts, Nisga'a
Richelle Woods, Dakota, in the DTES for 2.5 years
Rita Michelle, Cree, in the DTES for 45 years
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Rose Maxime, Neskonlith Shushwap, in the DTES for 20 years
Sandra C, Saddle Lake Cree, in the DTES for 20 years
Sarah Angus, Nisga'a, in the DTES for 6 months
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Sheila Dorma, Muskowekan, in the DTES for 6 months

Sheila Venn, Nisga'a, in the DTES for 5 years
Sophie Merasty, Denesuline and Woodlands Cree, in the DTES for 27 years
Stella August, Nuu-chah-nulth, in the DTES for 50 years
Susie Q, Shushwap-Salish, in the DTES for 40 years
Suzanne Kilroy, Okanagan
Tammy, Clapache Lytton, in the DTES for 15 years
Theresa Dolores Gray, Tsimshian, in the DTES all my life
Tia Hoppington-Scott, Xaxlip, in the DTES for 2 years
Tia Maria Perrault, Garden River Anishinaabe, in the DTES for 5 years
Tillie Alexie, Anaheim Lake Ulkatcho, in the DTES for 2 months
Tori S (pseudonym), Cree-Chippewa, in the DTES for 8 years
Valerie Manygreghorses, Blood Reserve, in the DTES for 41 years
Veronic Caprain, in the DTES for 38 years
Veronica, Anishinaabe, in the DTES for 38 years
Viola Karagaoga, Cahtawshistawa, in the DTES for 32 years
Yvette Danielle Renee McMillan, Haisla, in the DTES for 4 years

Non-Indigenous participants who are friends or street families of Indigenous women who are missing, or have overdosed or died from violence in the DTES:

Ava Caldwell
Darci Dickinson, in the DTES for 3 years
Debbie Ventura, in the DTES for 30 years
Deborah Strate, in the DTES for 18 years
Joan Morelli, in the DTES for 30 years
Lolita Adano
Markella Rosa, in the DTES for 8 months
Mary Mootrey, in the DTES for 26 years
Rebecca Wilkinson, in the DTES for 3 years
Shurli Chan, in the DTES for 12 years
Sue Mac, in the DTES for 2 years
Susan, in the DTES for 4 years
Syd Benjamin, in the DTES for 10 years

Teresa Ng, in the DTES since for 42 years

Trina Rumsey, in the DTES for 11 years

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ABOUT THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE WOMEN'S CENTRE

1. The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre (DEWC) is located in the heart of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). The DTES is a neighbourhood with disproportionate levels of manufactured and enforced violence, poverty, homelessness, child apprehension, criminalization, and fatal overdoses. Since 1978, DEWC provides support to women and their children through a drop-in centre and a low-barrier emergency night shelter for all self-identified women who face homelessness and violence. DEWC provides basic necessities such as hot meals, laundry, phone access, bathrooms and showers. DEWC also offers specialized advocacy through victim services, housing outreach, health teams, and legal advocates. Finally, DEWC supports long-term skills development and political advocacy through a peer-driven volunteer program, Indigenous elders council, healing circle, and a social justice project.
2. Five hundred women and children come through DEWC every day. DEWC has been named by [54 percent](#) of women in the DTES as the place they feel safest. This is because while there are hundreds of service providers in the DTES, there are merely three women-only spaces. Over 70 percent of women who access DEWC identify as Indigenous. Indigenous members are powerful voices in advocating for an end to violence and calling for a national inquiry for the past thirty years. As far back as the 1980's, DEWC provided police forces with names of women who had gone missing. Women and elders at DEWC established DEWC's emergency-night shelter, organize the annual February 14 Women's Memorial March, sit on a number of City of Vancouver committees, and participate in the SisterWatch program to draw attention to women's safety. DEWC has also participated in several United Nations reviews of Canada on the issue of violence against Indigenous women.
3. DEWC began a participatory process within our membership to gather input for the National Inquiry for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Over a period of five months and hundreds of hours, Indigenous women peer facilitators and DEWC staff gathered input from 113 Indigenous survivors of violence. Many are also biological family members and families of the heart of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. In addition, we gathered input from 15 non-Indigenous women who are friends or street families of Indigenous women who are missing, have overdosed, or died from violence in the DTES.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4. Violence against Indigenous women, girls, trans, and two-spirit people is the most pressing human rights issue in Canada today. Numerous international bodies have pushed Canada to eliminate violence against Indigenous women and girls. Indigenous women and girls in Canada have been murdered or have gone missing at a rate [four times](#) higher than the rate of representation of Indigenous women in the population in Canada. Indigenous women's [rate of violent victimization](#) is double that of Indigenous men, nearly triple that of non-Indigenous women, and more than triple that of non-Indigenous men. Two-spirit and trans people are violently victimized nearly [five times](#) as often.

“It’s been 30 years since my sister and her family have been missing, and I just want to bring them home.”

“Aboriginal women and girls are treated poorly out of ignorance by racist and patriarchal society.”

“No one deserves the violence and pain we go through. Nothing changes because our lives are not valued and because people think violence against us is ‘normal’ and ‘how it is’.”

“I deal with every kind of mockery. I get subjected to racism, misogyny and transphobia. I am always unsafe and when I am working the street, the johns always low ball and manipulate Native trans sex workers.”

5. The gruesome murder of an Indigenous mother in 1992 catalyzed the annual Women’s Memorial March, which continues thirty years later to honour the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and all women’s lives lost in the DTES. Many homicides and disappearances are still unsolved, including the recent murders and disappearances of DEWC members Lisa Arlene Francis, Angeline Pete, Ashley Machiskinic, and Verna Simmard. In the DTES, where approximately 8,000 women live and work, incidents of violence are [double the rates](#) of the rest of the city. In a DTES women’s safety audit, [87 percent](#) of women reported feeling unsafe and [48 percent](#) of women experienced violence within the last two years. The gendered colonialism of family trauma, child welfare, homelessness, policing, welfare system, and the opioid crisis all contribute to targeted insecurity and violence.

“I have survived all these years. We have lost a lot of women. I am a cousin of Cheryl Anne Joe who was cruelly murdered in 1992 on Powell Street. I have so much pain and anger. Thank you to all those who keep fighting.”

“My daughter Karissa Koks has been missing since October 2017.”

6. Indigenous women in the DTES are stigmatized as having ‘high-risk lifestyles’ and blamed for violence committed against them, when in fact colonial poverty and patriarchy are the highest risk factors in Indigenous women’s lives. Individual experiences of violence are inseparable from state violence including loss of land, forced poverty, homelessness, child apprehension, criminalization within the justice system, and health disparities.

“My whole life men ask me what I will give them in return for help. Even if I ask for a can of pop, they ask, ‘What are you going to do for me?’ So I decided to steal instead of asking for help from men. I would steal food, pop, and cigarettes from stores, or eat and dash from restaurants.”

“I started working on Seymour Street when they moved sex workers over to Davie Street. There were lots of murders back then. Women were killed and left in dumpsters. My sister was killed. We were addicts and hookers so no one cared. This was happening to Native women and trans women, and those like me who are Native and trans. We got no media, no investigation, no police help.”

7. Settler-colonialism intentionally targets Indigenous women in order to destroy families, sever the connection to land-based practices and economies, and devastate relational governance of Indigenous nations. Indigenous women’s and two-spirit people’s role as decision makers, holders of traditional knowledge, and matriarchal governance through house groups and clan systems in many nations was disrupted through colonization. The doctrine of discovery and the myth of *terra nullius* are racist legal-political frameworks that still underpin Canadian institutions through, for example, the false assertion of Crown Title over Indigenous lands.

“The root cause of Indigenous women’s violence is colonization. When colonizers came, they started murdering our women. That’s the root of violence. Assimilation is genocide against our women, and they treat us as not worthy. Nuns told me I should have never been born.”

“From land theft to residential schools to introduction of alcohol and 60’s scoop, our whole life is history of discrimination against our people.”

“Abolish the evil monarchy on Native Land.”

“Residential school was like a concentration camp. Our punishment for speaking our language was being kept in isolation in a dark room for the whole day. Often we would be fed food from the garbage and be forced to drink raw cow milk. We were strapped and beaten until we were too sore to stand.”

“I don’t have any respect for this Canadian law. The Canadian medical people killed my sister. They murdered her. She was the head of my family. How does my family go on when the head of my family has been murdered?”

8. Over the past 150 years, structural injustices - ranging from the *Indian Act* to forced removal of Indigenous children - have denied Indigenous women Title to their lands, and civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to self-determination. Indigenous people were forced off their territories and lands were fragmented into small and chronically underfunded reserves. Multiplying socio-economic oppressions within colonialism, such as loss of land, legislated sexism, over-crowded housing, food and water insecurity, family violence, child apprehension, inadequate services, and lack of educational opportunities and jobs, displace Indigenous women and children from their home communities. Sixty-four percent of all Indigenous women now live off reserve, and the impoverishment of Indigenous women in inner city neighbourhoods like the DTES is glaring when juxtaposed to the revenues generated by multinational and Crown corporations extracting resources from Indigenous lands.

“Everyone says Natives need to get educated, but we already know the history of this place. It’s the non-Natives who need the education, not us.”

“Rich White people need to pay a Native reparations tax that goes to Indigenous people.”

“Violence against land and violence against women is part of the genocide. They see our land as commodities and our women as objects.”

“I don’t agree with the new gas and oil pipelines and resource extraction in our home communities. It is good jobs with quick money, but it destroys our souls and our lands. And the fast quick money increases violence against women. It isn’t worth it even though we are impoverished.”

“They take oil and resources from our lands and territories but we get none of that money they make, we still live in poverty with no food, no housing and no education.”

“Our family is not just our immediate family, it’s our extended family, our relatives, our animal relations, the earth. These are all our family in our culture. We have to look after the health of the land. If the land isn’t healthy, then Native women won’t be healthy. When we say we need to take care of our families, this is what we mean. Western society is not a healthy way to live. White people need education to understand about our ways.”

“We are already forced onto small reserves and now we don’t even have homes on reserves.”

“We need housing and clean water on our reserves. The land is polluted and the water isn’t clean, but the church is still there. How can we live in our home communities with no homes, no water, no schools, and no jobs? We need chiefs to stand up to the White government and not sell our land and rights away.”

“I was raped on my reserve and no one did anything. I will never go back.”

“I haven’t been to my reserve in eight years and I don’t go there much. This is my home community now. And that is true for so many of us who spend our lives here and our sense of home is here.”

“What happens in our communities brings us down here, whether it is because we were apprehended or faced family violence, or our addictions. We have to take care of all these issues back home.”

9. A persistent barrier in the DTES is lack of access to safe spaces for women. While there are hundreds of agencies in the DTES, there is not a single Indigenous women's drop-in center operated by and for Indigenous women. In addition, there is a paternalistic relationship that often defines the nature of service provision. Indigenous women report feeling the need to perform politeness and gratitude in order to receive services, which actively undermines Indigenous women's rights and political mobilization. The construction of Indigenous women as 'victims in need of help' is a continuation of the civilizing/saviour mentality that deliberately marginalizes Indigenous women.

"Agencies in the DTES serve Indigenous people but it is not led by Indigenous people. We are not charity, we are capable of working and leading these agencies. This paternalism is another kind of colonial violence."

"Even the DTES agencies disempower us. They have policies that are unfair or discriminatory against us. But we cannot complain and have no recourse because we are reliant. We have to be 'good little Indians.'"

10. Indigenous women's poverty in the DTES is one of the main factors magnifying vulnerability to abusive relationships, sexual assault, child apprehension, exploitative work conditions, unsafe housing, food insecurity, poor health, and social isolation. The poverty rate for Indigenous women is [36 percent](#), which is [more than double](#) the percentage of non-Indigenous women. In a DTES women's safety audit, [57 percent](#) of women said that they had felt forced to do something they were not comfortable with in order to survive and make ends meet. In a separate [study](#), one-third of women on welfare reported staying or returning to an abusive partner for financial reasons, and one-fifth of women reported engaging in the survival sex trade due to welfare rules.

"I'm living and being kept in poverty."

"I can't live on my old age pension. It's so low. I've worked my whole life at the cannery and worked hard, and I just get \$1700 a month to live on. I'm 84 years old."

"If you are poor, you can't get good housing. If you can't get good housing, then your health and addictions deteriorates. And without good health and without a bus pass, you can't get a job. It's all related."

"One of the things about living down here is that we can never relax. This is a high stress and high pressure neighbourhood with emotional and sensory overload. I just want to be able to relax."

"We can't get out of the DTES if we want to. Everything is setup for us to remain here. We can't get housing or services or jobs anywhere else. And then staying in the DTES, we are stereotyped as 'from down there.'"

11. Income assistance and disability benefits in B.C. are [low](#): \$710 per month for a single person on income assistance and \$1133 plus a \$52 transportation subsidy per month for a person with a disability. Meanwhile, the average lowest rent in Single Room Occupancies (SRO's) in the DTES is \$687 per month. For someone on income assistance, this leaves [\\$23 per month](#) to meet all other living costs. Eligibility criteria for income assistance are also a barrier including the three-week work search, the two-year independence test, and low asset thresholds. Employable single parents are expected to work when their youngest child is three years old, which is unrealistic for many Indigenous single mothers especially in the absence of affordable child care. Recipients of income assistance cannot attend post-secondary education without losing all their income assistance benefits, and must instead apply for student loans. This means that Indigenous women on income assistance are more likely to enter into cycles of short-term, low-wage work or limited training programs.

“The thing about the DTES and living in poverty is we are always standing in line – line for laundry, line for food, line for clothing, line for showers, line to see social worker, line to see housing advocate, line for bathroom. We spend our whole day in lines. It’s frustrating.”

“Social assistance rates being so low is turning us into criminals. We have to steal to survive.”

“We need increased rates for welfare and disability assistance. And when rates do go up, then the prices of all the services and rents go up too. We need free transit, child care and education too.”

12. For Indigenous women who are seeking work, the primary barrier is discrimination by employers. Indigenous women in the DTES are stratified into low-wage work, and the \$12.65 per hour minimum wage in B.C. leaves Indigenous women living far below the poverty line. Work is part-time, casual, shift-based, or seasonal with no employment benefits including no sick time and no long-term job security. Indigenous women are also vulnerable to workplace violations including racist and sexualized harassment, wage theft, unpaid training, and overtime hours of work without pay. A particular challenge for Indigenous women in the DTES is that their work in non-profit agencies is often considered ‘volunteer hours’ and compensated with free meals or gift cards, even though they are expected to show up for full four to eight hour shifts and undertake primary job responsibilities.

“Native women face so much discrimination getting jobs. They should guarantee jobs and living wage for all Native women who want to and can work.”

13. Enforced poverty means that Indigenous women are more likely to suffer from a lack of safe and affordable housing. The DTES rate of change of new unaffordable housing units (condos, market rental, and social housing with rents above social assistance-shelter rate) to units affordable to those on social assistance or pension is [2:1](#). In the DTES, [1 in 18 people](#) are homeless. The average life expectancy of a homeless person in B.C. is between [40 and 49 years](#) old, and homeless people are also twice as likely to die by accident, suicide, or homicide.

“Instead of condos and fancy businesses going up in the DTES, we need more housing for our people.”

“I was on the strip since I was seven years old. I was homeless for eight years ‘by choice’ because the only other options were overcrowded shelters or infested SRO’s. I did a lot of shitty things and still do shitty things. I don’t hide anything. I’m a crackhead and an alcoholic. I steal but not from people. I steal from stores who have insurance and can afford it. When I steal, I sell my stuff on the street and I give the money to homeless people.”

“The governments don’t give a shit. They all promise housing just to get elected. I have no money left after I pay rent, and my boys live with me too. The government owes us housing for taking our land.”

14. Indigenous women represent [45 percent](#) of homeless women in the Metro Vancouver region, and all Indigenous members of DEWC have been homeless at some point in their lives. Indigenous women with children are the most likely to experience ‘invisible homelessness,’ such as staying temporarily with a family member or friend. Indigenous women often have to make the impossible decision between staying in an abusive relationship, or becoming homeless and having their children apprehended. Indigenous trans youth are also particularly vulnerable to homelessness with [one-third](#) of trans youth reporting rejection from shelters as a result of policies that police gender presentation. Finally, single Indigenous women elders are a fast growing demographic amongst Metro Vancouver’s homeless, with all seniors representing [23 percent](#) of the homeless population.

“I am down here with my daughter. We are homeless in a shelter. The government doesn’t help us. The people down here help each other and will give you the shirt off their back when you need it. And the shelter I was in, they kicked out 14 people from the shelter even though they had nowhere to go. At least one was an elder who is out on the street now.”

“I was sleeping outside for two weeks and couldn’t get on welfare. Those two weeks I was waiting I was so scared. I had no blankets and nowhere safe to sleep.”

“They always promise more housing but never build it. Not having affordable housing is a huge issue for women. It means girls and young women are more likely to stay with abusive guys.”

15. In a DTES women's survey, [one-quarter](#) of women reported feeling unsafe in their place of residence. Indigenous women report a number of issues with their private landlords or government-funded housing providers: discrimination by landlords who refuse to rent to Indigenous women on social assistance; illegal rent increases; substandard or no maintenance; negligence from staff and management; building staff who extort sex in exchange for maintenance services; constant bedbug and rat infestations; shared bathrooms and kitchens with no privacy; poor sanitation; illegal entry into suites; illegal rules such as not being allowed to use the backyard or not being allowed to have guests; room checks; curfews; requiring guest identification; no overnight guests allowed; being renovicted or demovicted; refusal to return security deposits; and evictions without cause. Under the provincial *Residential Tenancy Act* (RTA) the power imbalance is hugely skewed towards landlords, making it nearly impossible for tenants to effectively advocate for their rights and protections as tenants. Of even greater concern is that most supportive housing is not even covered under the RTA. This imbalance feels particularly egregious, as women report "we are no longer landlords on our own lands."

"We need more housing for everyone. They tore down all the low-income homes like the Balmoral and Regent SRO's where I was staying. Now so many of us from the Balmoral and Regent are out on the street and getting bugged by the cops to pack up our tents. They put some elders who were in the Regent into Jubilee Rooms that has no elevator. That's so messed up because they can't even get up to their rooms, and some of them are homeless now. I have been down here on and off since I was 13 years old and I have been homeless for five years. I am so sad for all of us down here."

"A landlord will agree to meet you, and then they see you and say the place is taken. There is no question that they are all racist landlords. I haven't met one who hasn't been racist towards me."

"There is a lot of discrimination against Native people for housing. Landlords won't rent to us, but even social housing where we should have priority; we have to wait the longest. And Native housing has non-Native people living there."

"My housing building has so many rules. I can't even have my family visit where I am right now. It's so unfair."

"It is so effing hard to get into nice, safe housing. Some housing here is so unsafe. You are taking a bath and someone comes through the door and rapes you."

"When there was violence against me in my building, the police didn't properly investigate and building staff didn't remove or move the person who gave me a brain injury. I am now being evicted for complaining about this."

"Instead of making sure women are safe by talking to us, the social housing providers just make more rules on us like 'no visitors allowed.' More rules aren't the solution to women's safety."

16. Every Indigenous woman in the DEWC membership has been embroiled in the child welfare system. Today there are [three times more](#) Indigenous children forcibly removed from their parents and placed into foster care than at the height of the residential school era. Indigenous children and youth in B.C. are [15 times more likely](#) to be in the care of Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The rate of investigations of Indigenous children is [4.2 times](#) the rate of non-Indigenous investigations and Indigenous families are being investigated for poverty-related ‘neglect’ at [eight times](#) the rate for non-Indigenous families. One hundred and twenty youth died in the provincial child welfare system in the year 2016, and 117 children died in the year 2017. The provincial Representative for Children and Youth’s office receives [200 critical injury and death reports](#) for children and youth in care every month.

“I am part of the 60’s scoop generation. We were apprehended from our families with federal consent. I had no culture, no language, no family, no extended family, no land growing up. The 60’s scoop also completely severed my gender identity. The 60’s scoop is cultural genocide like the residential schools, and was murder of our cultures and spirits.”

“I grew up in and out of foster homes as a result of the intergenerational trauma of my mother being in residential school. Now all of my children are in foster homes.”

“Most of the children in MCFD’s custody are Native children. I believe this is both a continuation of the residential school experience — where children were torn away from their families and communities — as well as a consequence itself of residential schools that forced Native families into social dysfunction with rampant alcohol/drug use and abuse in the home. I feel like the odds are stacked against us, but still we continue on.”

“All my children were taken away when they were born. I didn’t get any support as a mother. They just made me look like a bad mother. I had two boys and two girls and they wouldn’t let me see them or tell me where they were. And when they got older, the judge wouldn’t tell them who I was. They came and found me as adults.”

“Social workers don’t go to the houses of White people no matter how much fighting or violence is happening in their homes. Almost all Native kids go through the foster system. They call us ‘mortgage helpers’ because foster parents make money off us even though Native parents get no support.”

“MCFD makes me feel that I am a bad parent who neglects my children, but then I show concern about the treatment of my children in care and then that’s also apparently wrong. Every day is so traumatizing.”

“Social workers have so much power. They hold our children as hostage to make us agree to anything they say. But I won’t back down and will continue to speak out.”

“I was raised in foster care and abused in foster care. By the time I found my mother and brother, they died shortly after. My own children were apprehended twice, and their apprehension has just been set to trial. Our intergenerational trauma like addictions and residential school history is used against us to take our children. They want to label us and give us diagnosis so they can steal our children. And so many of our children and women are unaccounted for. Who is accountable for this?”

17. Indigenous girls in the B.C. child welfare system are [four times more likely](#) to be victims of sexual violence than non-Indigenous girls. Over 60 percent of children and youth who report sexual violence in government care are Indigenous girls. When they become adults, Indigenous survivors of childhood sexual abuse are [ten times more likely](#) to be sexually assaulted. Approximately 1000 youth across B.C. age out at the age of majority and are cut off from supports every year. Youth in and from the foster care system make up [60 percent of homeless youth](#) across Canada, and two-thirds of all Indigenous people in prison have been involved in the child welfare system. Youth in care in B.C. graduate high school at [less than half the rate](#) of their peers, and 40 percent have to rely on low rates of income assistance to survive.

“We need to keep families together. Colonization and missing and murdered Indigenous women has broken families. The children left behind by missing and murdered Indigenous women are mostly in foster care and then when they age out they end up on the street. The violence against missing and murdered Indigenous women continues with their children who are also violated and made vulnerable.”

“Like residential schools, there is so much physical and sexual abuse in the child welfare system. In another fifty years are they going to apologize for apprehending our children?”

18. Another barrier to ending violence is the failure of the entire criminal justice system to take violence against Indigenous women and girls seriously. As detailed in the [Final Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry](#), the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) failed to prevent and protect Indigenous women from violence and failed to diligently investigate violence when it occurred. One recent attempt by the VPD to improve relations is the SisterWatch program. While several agencies now have greater organizational trust with the VPD, an independent evaluation found that the program is [not successful](#) in building trust between the VPD and DTES women residents. In a DTES women’s safety audit, only [15 percent](#) of 157 women said they would go to the police if they felt unsafe.

“My sister Rose Leana Merasty was murdered 25 years ago in the DTES, and I only got the full investigation report from the VPD last year.”

“Guys are raping people and they get away with it. People who murder our mothers don't get arrested.”

“The police and judicial system don't charge offenders because the victims are Indigenous women.”

19. Many Indigenous women enter the criminal justice system because of their experiences as survivors of violence. Rather than receiving protection, the criminal justice system constructs Indigenous women as ‘risks’ to be contained, makes Indigenous women unsafe, and exacerbates Indigenous women’s inequality. Compared to non-Indigenous women, Indigenous women are more likely to be violently attacked by their abusers and are then more likely to be [counter-charged](#) by police. Most serious charges, like murder, that Indigenous women face are in relation to [defending](#) themselves or their children from violence. Indigenous women in the federal correctional system are, on average, younger than non-Indigenous women. [Ninety percent](#) report using drugs or alcohol the day they offended and [91 percent](#) report histories of physical and/or sexual abuse.

“When I got sentenced I was 16 years old. I was charged with manslaughter and sentenced for defending myself from rape by a priest in residential school. My son was born from and is proof of that rape. I was sent to max security at Kent Penitentiary. My first three years in there, I was in solitary confinement from the age of 16-19 years old. I served a total of seven out of my ten years in prison. I went straight from residential school to prison. From one system to another, there was no difference between the two.”

20. Indigenous women and girls are not only denied support from the police, they are also subjected to police harassment. Members of DEWC recount routine street checks (Indigenous women account for [21 percent](#) of all VPD street checks of women), detention, arrests, search and seizure, bylaw tickets, use of force, extortion of information, use of police dogs, escalation during a mental health crisis (a [majority](#) of police-shooting deaths in B.C. involve individuals experiencing a mental health crisis), entry into their homes, and ‘catch and release’ as a form of intimidation – often without legal cause. It is also noteworthy that [private security](#) in the DTES has dramatically increased and, due to presumed authority, they illegally move people off public property, seize property, issue tickets, or use force.

“Call 9/11 and say a Native person is a suspect and they will be right there. Call 9/11 and say you are a Native person who needs help, and they might show up in an hour. The police will always cuff Native people, but never help us when we need them.”

“The VPD takes stuff from street vendors. Street vendors work hard by binning just to make a few dollars to be able to eat. VPD officers taking vendors stuff should be charged with theft.”

“I got a ticket from VPD for crossing the street when the light wasn’t red. I am an Indigenous trans woman using a wheelchair. I felt like I was targeted.”

21. Once Indigenous women are arrested, they are more likely to be charged, held in pre-trial detention, rack up further charges from violations, plead guilty, and be sentenced to prison. Indigenous women are also the least likely to have full and appropriate legal representation. Gladue report programs remain underfunded, and Indigenous women are [nine times](#) more likely than non-Indigenous women to be sentenced to prison. The use of [mandatory minimum sentences](#) has increased and has removed judicial discretion to deliver sentences that reflect the unique circumstances of Indigenous women.

“When Native people get criminal records, it forces us more into low-paying jobs and welfare and more crime to survive. It’s meant to keep us down.”

“There is unequal justice. White people and rich people get leniency or get lawyered up, but my son is doing so much time. I am not excusing what my son did, but he confessed to his crime and turned himself in but he had no lawyer and did no Gladue report and is serving a full sentence. Now when he comes out, he may turn to drugs and will have a hard time getting a job. I don’t know if he will get a second chance like the rich people or White people do.”

22. In the Pacific and Prairie regions, Indigenous women make up more than [50 percent](#) of the federally incarcerated female population. In the provincial custody system, [41 percent](#) of women are Indigenous women. Approximately [75 percent](#) of women in provincial prisons are sentenced for administrative crimes or fraud, possession of stolen property, and theft – all of which are essentially poverty-related offenses. Discrimination against Indigenous women in the prison system is a series of compounding discriminations. Indigenous women serve disproportionately more of their sentence behind bars before first release and are more likely to remain in prison until their statutory release date or warrant expire date; are over-classified in maximum security institutions and under-represented in community supervision populations or Healing Lodges; are disproportionately placed into segregation; have less access to rehabilitative and culturally-relevant programs in prison; are generally excluded from the Mother-Child Program; are more likely to return to prison on revocation of parole; and are often labeled ‘dangerous offenders’ or ‘hard to manage’ because of offenses in resistance to prisons.

“Prison is a revolving door for Native people.”

“Prisons are not part of Aboriginal culture. It’s a colonial model based on punishment and not justice. In my home community, we go through circles if there is an issue and it’s more healing and rehabilitative. Especially when the root issues are alcohol and trauma, then prisons just make it worse.”

23. A final and critical factor in ending violence against Indigenous women in the DTES is the urgent need to address Indigenous women's wellness. Indigenous women's health in the DTES is inseparable from the intergenerational trauma of colonization overlapping with the specific health challenges that are concentrated in the neighbourhood. Indigenous women in the DTES report a number of barriers to accessing healthcare: having no family doctor; illnesses going untreated; refusal of pain medication because of 'drug-seeking' narratives; fear of judgment, child apprehension, and forced institutionalization if personal information such as abuse, substance use, or mental health challenges is disclosed; and routinely having security and police called on them by hospital staff.

“As soon as they find out you are from the DTES at St. Paul's Hospital, they treat you so much worse. They think you are there for drugs, and they make you wait longer and don't take your health concerns seriously.”

“My counsellor told the judge and my social worker everything I disclosed. That was a violation of my trust and I never went back. What we tell them cannot be used against us in the justice system.”

“We need more Native healthcare workers who know this community. And we need health clinics to be more low-barrier and open for longer hours.”

24. The municipal government declared a mental health crisis in the city and the Provincial Health Officer has declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency. There is a correlation between the mental health crisis and the opioid crisis. According to [findings](#) of a report by the BC Coroner's Service, more than half of the people who died as a result of drug overdose in the province during the years 2016 and 2017 had a clinical diagnosis or anecdotal evidence of a mental health challenge, and 79 percent who died were in contact with health services in the year prior to their death. [Indigenous women](#) are disproportionately impacted by the opioid crisis and are experiencing eight times more overdoses and five times more fatal overdoses than non-Indigenous women.

“My daughter overdosed. I left her in my room to get her food. When I came back she had overdosed. I did CPR while waiting on 911 for the ambulance. She died in my room. My family blamed me for my daughter's passing, and I felt alone after her death. Then I lost my home and became homeless on the streets and slept on park benches. My daughter's children got apprehended and they are now in Ministry care. The residential school agent is now the MCFD social worker. Those grandkids are my life. Now I am alone and I walk around the town by myself in deep depression.”

“When we seek help for anything for our mental health we need our own people to be the ones listening to us. Our own people who understand we are not crazy but that this system makes us crazy.”

25. In conclusion, Indigenous women's over-representation in statistics on poverty, homelessness, child apprehensions, police street checks, incarceration, opioid overdose fatalities, and health inequities are part of an infrastructure of gendered colonial violence. Colonial state practices target women for removal from Indigenous lands, tear children from their families, enforce impoverishment, and manufacture the conditions for dehumanization. The 200 recommendations in this report to end state and societal violence are based on three core principles:

* Violence against Indigenous women and girls is a violation of inherent, constitutional, and internationally protected Indigenous rights. Implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) at all levels of government, assertion of Indigenous Title over lands and jurisdiction over law-making, and restoration of collective Indigenous women's rights and governance is the only meaningful way to end this violence.

* Increased state enforcement alone cannot eliminate violence against Indigenous women and girls because structural violence is connected to individual acts of male violence. A comprehensive plan to end violence against Indigenous women must address socio-economic factors including equitable access and self-determination over land, culture, language, housing, child care, income security, employment, education, and physical, mental, and spiritual health.

* Indigenous women in the DTES are not silent victims or stereotypes. Indigenous women in the DTES come from diverse nations and families, and have unique stories and dreams. Indigenous women in the DTES are all leaders who contribute countless hours to the community and will never stop fighting for justice. Any policies, services, and solutions must be based in Indigenous women's collective input and leadership.

"We are red women rising!"

VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

My experiences of violence:

Daily racism and ignorance from services, authorities, and businesses

Male violence and misogyny

Constant negative media stereotypes

It's all around and violence is normalized on the street and in my family

Store owners and workers follow me and assume I don't have money

Poverty and homelessness

Violence as a sex worker from johns, police, and criminalizing laws

Legacy of residential schools

Government doesn't care about us

Family separation and isolation

Undervalued and don't have a voice

Everyone thinks they are better than us

Traumatized from my friends being killed or overdosing

Feel powerless and controlled by men, white supremacy, and government

Learnt behaviours that make me unaware of controlling behaviours by abuser

Police violence and fear of police

No repercussions for offenders against Indigenous women

Street fights are unpredictable

Lateral violence and street violence between Native women

Tourists taking photos of our women down and out on the street

Kidnapped from our parents and now kidnapping of our children

Housing and transit is unsafe

People automatically assume I am a sex worker, drug user, or on welfare

Dealers prey on Native women and debt extortion is more violent now

More young white men dealers on the corners who are more threatening and disrespectful

I am invisible and there is no acknowledgement by others

Work late hours and unsafe to get home

Lack of support, resources, or care

Dependent on different abusive men for survival

No late-night drop-ins or shelters

Service provision does not connect or empower

Service providers have favouritism of clients and discriminate against Indigenous women

Agencies have unreasonable policies and no complaint process

No safe space for Indigenous women only in DTES

All services are in DTES and no other areas with services

The DTES agencies are not integrated or coordinated

More funding for anti-violence programs and victim services advocacy

There are no Indigenous women survivors groups to come together

Need more Native-run centers

Need more lights and Indigenous community patrol on the streets

Street accompaniment for women drinking or using to get home safely

Need Indigenous women workers in the DTES who live our issues

Need warrior societies and elders to work with men to prevent violence

- This is a summary of the key points raised. More extensive responses are in the full report.

DISPLACEMENT FROM LAND

My experiences in my home community:

Land is being stolen

Broken treaties

Indigenous rights not respected by Canada

Indian land is now called Crown Land

Industry is ruining the land and displacing people

No consent for development projects like mining and fossil fuels

Water is being polluted

Animals and fish are dying

Loosing our plant medicines on the land

No clean drinking water on reserve

Not enough housing on reserve

Poor conditions of housing on reserve

Not enough spots in school for our children

Hard to get money for school from my band

High food prices

Disappearing traditional foods like salmon and moose

Deforestation

High rates of suicide

Lots of children being apprehended on reserve

Off reserve members have no help from band council

Stigma from own community against Native women on the street

Loss of language and culture

More funding given to French languages than to First Nations languages

Chief and council are corrupt and don't equally represent people

Band Councils are set up by *Indian Act* and white colonial government laws

Reserve still has to follow Canadian laws

Canada still controls our services and institutions on reserve

Not enough services or programs but more drugs on reserve

Everything is underfunded on reserve

Lots of cancer and diabetes on reserve

My mother lost her status

Cycles of child abuse and family violence from residential schools

Violence is normalized and no anti-violence programs or shelters

Indian Act laws are racist and sexist

Forced out of my community because I am two-spirit

No prevention or education on violence against women and two-spirit people

- This is a summary of the key points raised. More extensive responses are in the full report.

POVERTY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

My experiences living in poverty:

No money to live

We are poor because they are rich from taking our land

Can't live on my pension

Not enough money on welfare

Disability assistance is too low

Too hard to get on welfare

Different categories are degrading

They should allow us to make more money on welfare and disability

Disability assistance process is long and complicated

No more individual caseworkers

Long wait on the phone to speak to Ministry

Can't afford transit, medication, or clothes

Transit is too expensive

Finding free food while on welfare takes time away from finding job

Cannot eat healthy food I need for my diabetes

Sometimes my kids go to school without lunch

DTES agencies discriminate against hiring Indigenous women

No one hires Native women

We only get hired as volunteers to work for free or \$2 an hour

Working wage is not enough

Can't get a good job if I don't have child care

Native women are capable but underemployed

Not enough employment or training programs for Indigenous women to get jobs

Can't afford to go to college or university to get higher paying job

Worked my whole life but people assume I won't be a good worker

More dependent on male partner

More vulnerable to sexual violence

Poverty cycles and racism keeps us in street work

Our families are kept poor so they can apprehend kids
Triple oppression as poor Indigenous woman
Residential school survivors shouldn't be suffering in poverty
It's a cycle that never ends
Keeping us poor is colonial strategy
No one helps Indigenous women get out of poverty
I wouldn't be poor if I could live like my ancestors

- This is a summary of the key points raised. More extensive responses are in the full report.

HOUSING

My experiences of housing:

Not enough affordable housing

Rent is too high

There is not enough Native housing

Native women should not be homeless on Native land

Long BC Housing waitlist

BC Housing process is complicated and intrusive questions

Government always makes false promises to end homelessness

Not enough housing for families and then our kids get apprehended

It is not safe for women to sleep on the street

I stayed in abusive relationships otherwise I would be homeless

Lack of safety for two-spirit and trans women in housing

Not enough assisted housing for seniors

Money going into market rental supplements instead of social housing

Private landlords won't rent to Native women on welfare

DTES is full of slumlords

Deplorable housing conditions: rodents, bedbugs, dirty, too small, no privacy

SROs are unsafe: no doors on rooms, theft, sexual assault

No enforcement against landlords

Managers will evict without cause or extort sex to let you keep housing

Renovictions and demovictions

Lot of DTES housing is not self-contained

Supportive housing has unfair rules: no guests overnight, curfews, monitoring

Supportive housing feels like an institution with rules and penalties

We have to double or triple bunk in housing

Housing is small, isolating and they won't allow ceremony or gatherings

Without housing I can't get a job and get stuck in poverty

Cannot get physically healthy or mentally stable without housing

Homeless women use drugs more to feel less cold and hunger
See more homeless Indigenous women, youth, and elders
Modular housing does not work for homeless Indigenous women
Landlords and housing agencies don't select Indigenous women
Fear of standing up for rights or face eviction
Housing gets taken over by pimps or dealers in the building
Not enough women's shelters and transition homes
Co-ed shelters are not safe for women
Theft in shelters means have to choose between keeping belongings and place to stay
Gentrification is bringing rich people, rich housing, rich stores
Not enough housing outreach workers or advocates
Not enough social housing outside the DTES

- This is a summary of the key points raised. More extensive responses are in the full report.

CHILD WELFARE

My experiences of child welfare services:

Taking children for no reason too easily

Child welfare is kidnapping

White families don't have children apprehended for yelling or being poor

Child apprehension is colonial genocide

It is like residential schools and 60's scoop never ended

It should be illegal to apprehend babies and infants

White foster homes shouldn't be allowed to take Native children

Ministry does not consider harm from family separation

There should be no MCFD. Our babies should stay in our nation

Children and youth do not receive proper care and there is physical and sexual abuse

Youth get cut off from all support when they age out

No one is charged with neglect when Native children die in care

Children in care never leave the system, they go from MCFD to street to prison

There is no accountability or oversight

Not enough resources, programs, or financial or emotional support for parents

Money should be given to parents and families instead of foster families

Need more parenting programs and family counselling instead of investigations

They do not place children with extended family or in community

Most foster parents only care about the money they are making off our children

There is no screening for foster fathers who are raping girls

MCFD does not inform us about foster family background

Social workers treat families poorly and are disrespectful

MCFD workers aren't trained about colonization

Investigations are arbitrary and not enough communication

Parenting capacity assessment process is racist

Visitations are monitored and there is no privacy

They say "we want to help you" but if you tell them anything they will use it against you. Just like the cops

Not enough Native social workers and advocates

VACFASS is as racist because they are still under MCFD

There is no clear timelines or plan for when children will be returned

Social workers will cancel visitations and move kids to new homes without notice

The courts believe MCFD and don't listen to Native mothers

Government does not want us to be together as strong families and nations

Need Indigenous control over child welfare with our elders guiding us

Let Indian extended families and foster families look after Indian children

- This is a summary of the key points raised. More extensive responses are in the full report.

POLICING, PRISONS & JUSTICE SYSTEM

My experiences of the justice system:

Racism from judges, lawyers, police

Indigenous law is not valued

Misogyny and sexual assault from police

Cops are harassing, humiliating, threatening, intimidating

Feel unsafe with cops who have too much power and weapons

Cops show up quick to arrest a Native person but not when we need help

Police violence

Serial killers are all white men but they act like we are the biggest criminals

Hard to make complaints against police

No police accountability or oversight

The laws don't help poor Native women

Laws criminalize us for petty theft, drug possession, and tenting on streets

We aren't told about Gladue reports

Jay walking and bylaw tickets given more to Native people

Not enough Native courtworkers or lawyers

Not enough free legal services and there is no Indigenous legal clinic

There is no access to justice if you are poor Indigenous woman

Don't understand their system

Lawyers don't listen well and will twist our words and stories

Colonial system not made for us

Government makes these laws and enforces them to keep us down

Public officials don't have cultural sensitivity training

Criminal record makes it impossible to get work and get more stuck in poverty cycle

More minor violations like breaches keep adding up

System is colonial and corrupt

Prisons are not restorative

Overrepresentation of our women in prisons

Pipeline from child welfare to prisons

Not enough support for people leaving prisons

Mostly Indigenous women in maximum security and segregation

Prisons are not safe and return back even more hardened

Alternatives to prisons like healing lodges give spots to White women

No healthcare in prison

No treatment, healing circles, and legal services in prison

Not enough alternatives to prison like circle sentencing or restorative justice

We need return of our tribal laws and warrior societies

- This is a summary of the key points raised. More extensive responses are in the full report.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

My experiences of healthcare:

Racism everywhere in the healthcare system
Alienating and colonial system
Bureaucratic and inaccessible system and get referred out
Not believed or trusted
Level of care is inconsistent
Clinics won't prescribe drugs because of 'drug-seeking' narratives
They are the drug pushers and call us the druggies
Doctors and nurses treat Native women poorly
Healthcare professionals are not educated in our issues and cultures
Disrespect of reproductive sovereignty
Need Indigenous and female healthcare workers
Health workers let social workers apprehend babies from hospital
Discharge you without any help or housing
Not enough family doctors
Cuts to extended healthcare
Not enough home care or home support
Cannot get scooters, prescriptions, or alternative treatments covered
Not enough elder support or transport to access medical appointments
More doctor and nurse home-visits, mobile vans, community clinics
No Native medicines being used and no attention to spiritual health
No Indigenous health centers based in holistic Indigenous healing
No healthy food. We mostly eat starch and sugar
Not enough community gardens and healthy community kitchens
Don't have enough drinking water or clean bathrooms
Not enough mental health support or counsellors
Cannot access counselling without medical diagnosis and getting labeled
People with mental health and trauma issues not getting help
High suicide rates but nothing changes

Long waitlist for addictions treatment and mental health teams
Not enough detox or treatment on demand
Need consumption sites for Indigenous women only
No land-based or culturally safe treatment for Native women only
No ongoing support to access treatment and stay clean
Opioid crisis is genocide
Canadian colonialism is an infectious disease
Don't trust the system and don't use it
Colonization and poverty makes me crazy

- This is a summary of the key points raised. More extensive responses are in the full report.

Thirty-five Key Recommendations

Full Indigenous jurisdiction:

1. Implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* at all levels of government; assertion of Aboriginal Title over lands; jurisdiction over all areas of law-making; and restoration of collective Indigenous women's rights and governance.

Active Indigenous women's leadership:

2. All levels of Canadian government, national aboriginal organizations, and non-profit agencies must ensure the active leadership of Indigenous women in the design, implementation and review of programs and policies that are directed to increase the safety of Indigenous women. Strengthen and support solutions that restore the role of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people as Title-holders of their lands, traditional knowledge keepers, sacred life-givers, and matriarchs within extended kinship networks.

Eliminating structural violence against Indigenous women and girls:

3. Increased state enforcement alone cannot eliminate violence against Indigenous women and girls because structural violence is connected to individual acts of male violence. A comprehensive national-level integrated action plan to eliminate violence against Indigenous women and girls must address all the socio-economic factors impacting Indigenous women's, girls, trans and two-spirit safety including equitable access and self-determination over land, culture, language, housing, child care, income security, employment, education, and physical, mental, sexual and spiritual health.

Legislative reform to reduce Indigenous women's manufactured vulnerability:

Immediate legislative reform including but not limited to:

4. Implement independent civilian oversight of officials responsible for responding to and investigating violence against Indigenous women. Ensure that administrative, disciplinary or criminal measures are available to hold such officials accountable when officers are found to have failed to act on reports of missing women or to have carried out biased or inadequate investigations of violence against Indigenous women.
5. Remove discrimination from the *Indian Act* by making women and men equal in the ability to pass on status, repair situations where discrimination against women has disadvantaged those claiming status through the mother's line, and remove the two-parent rule for transmitting status and the 6(2) cutoff that withholds status from the children of many women who are unable or unwilling to provide the father's name.
6. End the apprehension of Indigenous children and prohibit the placement of Indigenous children into non-Indigenous foster and adoptive families.
7. Require Gladue factors to be used as mitigating factors only, unless the victim is an Indigenous woman in which case her wishes should take precedence over an offender.
8. End the policing practice of street checks; reduce the number of bylaw infraction tickets issued by police in the DTES; prohibit police from carrying and using all lethal weapons; develop guidelines to facilitate greater use of police discretion not to lay charges especially for minor poverty-related offences; and end the counter-charging and criminalization of Indigenous women who defend themselves or their children.
9. Commit to using non-incarceration and alternative measures especially for minor offenses committed by Indigenous women. Governments must also provide sufficient and stable funding to Indigenous communities and organizations to provide alternatives to incarceration including community-based rehabilitation, diversion, community courts, and restorative justice methods geared towards Indigenous women.
10. Repeal laws that criminalize or increase harm for Indigenous women in the sex trade.
11. End the criminalization of people who use or possess small amounts of illicit substances.

12. End the criminalization of homelessness by eliminating bylaw infractions and criminal charges for sleeping or tenting in public spaces, and end the displacement of tent cities.
13. Change government definitions of social housing and affordable housing to mean rates that are affordable to people on social assistance, and rents that are income-g geared not market-g geared.
14. Amend the provincial *Residential Tenancy Act* to cover all housing and to strengthen tenants rights. Amend the provincial *Human Rights Code* and *Residential Tenancy Act* to make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of social condition including health status and drug use.
15. Implement an Indigenous reparations tax on top of property taxes on residential, commercial and industrial properties, with all revenues going to implementation of an Indigenous poverty reduction plan.

Immediate Services needed in the DTES:

Implementation of comprehensive services in the DTES including but not limited to:

16. At least one multipurpose Indigenous Women’s Center in the DTES that is run by and for Indigenous women with long-term funding and wrap-around supports including healing support, communal kitchen, child care facility, elder accompaniment, artisan training and vending, and 24/7 educational, cultural, recreational, and empowerment-based programming to bring Indigenous women together collectively. This would also serve as a single point of access to connect to integrated services.
17. Fund more 24/7 low-barrier emergency shelters, transition homes, and drop-ins for women with long-term funding and full wrap-around supports. Also fund more Indigenous-centered and community-based, rather than police-based, victim services programs that provide holistic support including connection to land-based healing and guidance from elders.

18. An Indigenous Health and Wellness Centre in the DTES and Indigenous-run health programs that use Indigenous methods to address physical, mental, sexual, emotional, and spiritual harms. Also fund more mobile healthcare vans and community-based clinics, street nurses, and healthcare providers in the DTES.
19. Guarantee access to affordable, healthy and nutritious foods especially fruits, vegetables and meat in the DTES. This means more community gardens, food banks, non-profit grocery stores and providing discount cards for regular super markets.
20. Expand non-policing options for publicly intoxicated people, including civilian-operated 24/7 sobering centers providing appropriate care for Indigenous women.
21. Rapid easy access to Indigenous women's detox-on-demand where there is no time limit, Indigenous-run treatment centers, indoor overdose prevention sites and consumption sites for Indigenous women only, access to safer drug supply, and full spectrum of substitution treatment options.
22. Guarantee a 24/7 Indigenous mental health and addictions counselling program that is low-barrier, drop-in based, available on demand, and includes overnight street-based counselling in the DTES. Also ensure long-term mental health and addiction services, ranging from prevention, early intervention, treatment, crisis care, home visits, and aftercare.
23. Fund an Indigenous legal clinic in the DTES that can support Indigenous women in all criminal and civil legal matters including but not limited to family, criminal, mental health, and poverty law issues.
24. Fund a Bear Clan Patrol in the DTES that is led by Indigenous residents and based in Indigenous reciprocal responsibilities of safety, security, and kinship.
25. Provide a free medical accompaniment program where women are guaranteed rides and an accompaniment advocate for all medical appointments.

26. Provide an annual transport allowance for Indigenous women in the DTES to be able to travel to their home community.
27. Create a diversity of low-barrier, peer-based jobs in the DTES with priority hiring and support for Indigenous women of the community. Ensure that peer workers are paid a living wage, have full benefits, and the right to unionization. Recognize the contribution of volunteers and create appropriate and accredited volunteer programs to transfer skills and enable access to employment.

Guaranteed Public Services:

Guarantee a range of public services including but not limited to:

28. Provide a safe and affordable home for every Indigenous woman on and off reserve. This housing must be with long-term security of tenure, independent of matrimonial or common-law status, and self-contained units of at least 400 square feet with bathrooms and kitchens. Housing must also consider specific needs such as mobility access, space for children and extended families, and ceremonial practices. Highest priority for social housing should be given to Indigenous women fleeing violence and Indigenous mothers at risk of child apprehension.
29. Provide all residential school survivors with a guaranteed livable income for the rest of their lives. Increase federal pensions and provincial income and disability rates to the Market Basket Measure. Eliminate barriers to accessing income and disability assistance by reducing unnecessary eligibility criteria and simplifying the application processes. End clawbacks, increase earnings exemptions, and raise all asset limitations for those on income and disability assistance.
30. Ensure Indigenous mothers are able to maintain an adequate standard of living by raising income assistance and disability rates, ensuring safe and affordable housing, and guaranteeing food and transit allowances. Provide grandparents raising grand children, and all kinship care providers, with livable incomes and benefits. Provide income, housing, food, transit and all additional supports to youth transitioning out of government care until the age of 25 years old.

31. Guarantee a free and culturally appropriate child care system for all Indigenous families, including families awaiting kinship care placements, that accommodates children of all needs and abilities and is independent from child welfare services.
32. Universal public healthcare coverage to include supplements, prescriptions, counselling, dental, optical, mobility devices, adaptive equipment, and alternative treatments like acupuncture.
33. Provide a free transit pass for children ages 0-18 years old, all youth transitioning out of government care till age 25 years old, and for all adults on pensions, income assistance, and disability assistance.
34. Establish free public bus transportation between each town and city located along the entire length of Highway 16 and all other highways, with a number of safe homes and emergency phone booths along the length of all the highways.
35. Provide free tuition for all post-secondary education for all Indigenous women and girls, and eliminate all existing student loans for Indigenous women and girls.

ANNEX A: Full List of Two Hundred Recommendations

Recommendations to End Violence Against Indigenous Women in the DTES

1. Adopt a national-level integrated action plan to eliminate violence against Indigenous women and girls that:
 - a. Addresses all the socio-economic factors impacting Indigenous women's, girls, trans and two-spirit safety including equitable access and self-determination over land, culture, language, housing, child care, income security, employment, education, and physical, mental, sexual and spiritual health.
 - b. Incorporates the specific needs of extremely marginalized communities like the DTES.
 - c. Sets public timelines for implementation of existing recommendations from CEDAW, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, UN Human Rights Committee, Assembly of First Nations, Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Highway of Tears Symposium, and Native Women's Association of Canada.
 - d. Establishes a national database on murdered and missing Indigenous women, with accurate data collection on rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls.
 - e. Prioritizes a public education campaign in schools, transit system, media outlets, and community centers on Indigenous rights and systemic racism.
 - f. Immediately establishes free free public bus transportation system between each town and city located along the entire length of Highway 16 and all other highways, with a number of safe homes and emergency phone booths along the length of all the highways.
 - g. Ensures adequate human, technical and financial resources allocated for implementation, monitoring and assessment of such a plan.
2. All policies at all levels of government impacting Indigenous women must meet the requirements set out in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This includes full implementation of Indigenous jurisdiction over Indigenous lands, justice systems, and all areas of law-making.
3. Strengthen and support solutions that restore the role of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people as Title-holders of their lands, traditional knowledge keepers, sacred life-givers, and matriarchs within extended kinship networks. All levels of Canadian government, national aboriginal organizations, and non-profit agencies must ensure the active leadership of Indigenous women in the design, implementation and review of programs and policies that are directed to increase the safety of Indigenous women.

4. Remove discrimination from the *Indian Act* by making women and men equal in the ability to pass on status, repair situations where discrimination against women has disadvantaged those claiming status through the mother's line, and remove the two-parent rule for transmitting status and the 6(2) cutoff that withholds status from the children of many women who are unable or unwilling to provide the father's name.

Anti-Violence Services in the DTES:

5. At least one multipurpose Indigenous Women's Center in the DTES that is run by and for Indigenous women with long-term funding and wrap-around supports including healing support, communal kitchen, child care facility, elder accompaniment, artisan training and vending, and 24/7 educational, cultural, recreational, and empowerment-based programming to bring Indigenous women together collectively. This would also serve as a single point of access to connect to integrated services.
6. Fund more 24/7 low-barrier emergency shelters, transition homes, and drop-ins for women with long-term funding and full wrap-around supports including culturally-centered and holistic victim services, healing supports, counselling, legal assistance, programming and recreational activities for Indigenous survivors of violence.
7. Fund a 24/7 Indigenous street intervention team that is staffed with counsellors and emergency services.
8. Fund a Bear Clan Patrol in the DTES that is led by Indigenous residents and based in Indigenous reciprocal responsibilities of safety, security, and kinship.
9. Fund training and certification for Indigenous women in the DTES to form a number of Indigenous Crisis Response Teams including search and rescue, family support, and community coordination to be ready to serve when an Indigenous women or girl goes missing in the DTES.
10. Fund more Indigenous-centered and community-based, rather than police-based, victim services programs. These programs should provide land-based healing, cultural programs, counselling based in Indigenous practices, and guidance from elders.
11. Create violence prevention programs based in teachings of egalitarian gender roles including of two-spirited people, and teaching about consent, power, healthy relationships, emotional skills, and sexual health.
12. All service providers, police, prosecutors, and judges should receive mandatory and ongoing training in the causes and consequences of violence against Indigenous women and girls. This includes training on the duty to protect Indigenous women from violence and training on dealing with bereaved and grieving loved ones with compassion and sensitivity.
13. All agencies in the DTES must:
 - a. Provide mandatory training to staff and management in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, anti-racism, colonization, cultural competency, trauma-informed support, and Indigenous women's human rights.

- b. Prioritize Indigenous women's safety and needs in allocating resources and services.
- c. Guarantee appropriate services for Indigenous trans, lesbian and two-spirit women by operating specific programming that supports their needs, and ensuring that two-spirit identity is widely understood and supported.
- d. Shift from providing services towards empowering the collective leadership of Indigenous women as hired workers, managers, board members, and within elders councils.
- e. Implement an ongoing Warriors Against Violence program for men and masculine people.
- f. Be subject to regular independent oversight and audits that include input from Indigenous women to ensure they are being pro-actively included and respected, and not marginalized, discriminated against, or excluded by the agencies' practices.

Support for family members:

- 14. Provide access to free and independent legal representation, victim services, counselling, and financial restitution to the families of missing or murdered Indigenous women, including street families and families of the heart.
- 15. Provide accessible information for families such as a toolkit on missing persons investigations, how to access legal and emotional support, and dealing with the media.
- 16. Provide annual local, regional and national opportunities for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and families of the heart in the DTES to spend time together, support each other, and guide a national action plan.
- 17. Establish an annual retreat for children of missing and murdered Indigenous women.
- 18. Establish a legacy fund for the children of missing and murdered Indigenous women that supports the children till at least the age of 25 years old with housing, education, healing programs, recreational programs, and cultural connection.

Policing protocols:

- 19. Ensure that all cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women are duly investigated and prosecuted by standardizing protocols for police handling of cases, including coordination of police investigations into long-term missing persons cases and unsolved murders of Indigenous women and girls.
- 20. Review and repair police policies and procedures that are conducive to violence against Indigenous women, girls, trans and two-spirit people.
- 21. Ensure that family members and relatives are regularly contacted, have access to information about the development of investigations, and are informed about their rights in any legal proceedings.

22. Implement independent civilian oversight of officials responsible for responding to and investigating violence against Indigenous women. Ensure that administrative, disciplinary or criminal measures are available to hold such officials accountable when officers are found to have failed to act on reports of missing women or to have carried out biased or inadequate investigations of violence against Indigenous women.
23. Provide Indigenous women, their families, and community advocates with an available and effective procedure to file complaints in the case of noncompliance or negligence by officials, and information on how to initiate and pursue that procedure.
24. Ensure adequate support and protection for witnesses.

Recommendations to End Indigenous Women's Displacement from Land

1. All levels of the Canadian government must fully implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and apply its principles, norms, and standards including the right to self-determination and the right to exercise free, prior, and informed consent.
2. Change federal, provincial and municipal policies to uphold Aboriginal Title and Indigenous jurisdiction over all areas of law-making that impact on reserve and off reserve nation members.
3. All levels of government must respect and honour historic Treaty relationships.
4. All levels of Canadian government must repudiate *terra nullius* and the Doctrine of Discovery, and end policies of assimilation of Indigenous peoples and policies of extinguishment of Aboriginal Title.
5. All levels of government and police forces must end the criminalization of Indigenous peoples who are asserting their jurisdiction and rights to lands and resources.
6. All Canadian and Aboriginal governments must ensure that Indigenous women are engaged fully and have equitable access to decision-making on issues of governance, land, culture, language, housing, child care, income security, employment, education, health and other areas impacting Indigenous women.
7. Remove discrimination from the *Indian Act* by making women and men equal in the ability to pass on status, repair situations where discrimination against women has disadvantaged those claiming status through the mother's line, and remove the two-parent rule for transmitting status and the 6(2) cutoff that withholds status from the children of many women who are unable or unwilling to provide the father's name.
8. Compensation for the disenfranchisement and lack of protections for women and their descendants as a result of the discriminatory *Indian Act* and matrimonial real property laws.

On reserve:

9. The federal government must guarantee:

- a. Access to clean drinking water; food security based on a traditional diet; critical infrastructure including roads and sanitation systems; and essential health, education, child care, housing, transport, recreational, cultural and emergency services on every reserve.
 - b. Safe, affordable and livable housing for every woman on her reserve that is independent of her matrimonial status.
 - c. Affordable child care and licensed day care options on every reserve.
 - d. Complete complement of maternal and infant/child health services on reserve to enable women to remain closer to home to give birth.
 - e. Free public transportation between each town and city located along the entire length of Highway 16 and all other highways, with a number of safe homes and emergency phone booths along the length of all the highways.
 - f. Increase funding on all reserves for programs and services that strengthen traditional and cultural knowledge grounded in Indigenous laws, values and practices.
 - g. Range of anti-violence services including preventive programs, crisis intervention, victim services, advocacy support, restorative justice circles, shelters, transitional housing, and second-stage housing on every reserve.
 - h. Cultural sensitivity training for all first responders such police, healthcare professionals, and social workers who assist survivors of violence on reserve.
10. Implementation of overarching substantive federal legislation to protect the rights of women and children living on reserve in the interim until First Nations' communities can develop their own laws to replace matrimonial real property laws. This legislation should include opt-out clauses.
 11. Implementation of and full funding for federal Indigenous Child Welfare legislation that is attentive to specific First Nations, Metis and Inuit needs. Ensure that Indigenous nations resume sole jurisdiction, and not simply service delivery, over child welfare for child-members of the nation who are on reserve and off reserve.
 12. End the apprehension of Indigenous children due to poverty or Eurocentric ideas of neglect that stem from a legacy of colonization.
 13. All levels of government should fully implement Jordan's Principle.
 14. The federal government must eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and First Nations children being educated off reserve, and provide sufficient funding to close educational attainment gaps.

15. Increase funding for the *Indigenous Languages Act* to preserve, revitalize and strength all Indigenous languages. This should include efforts to hire and accredit language speakers to teach the language as credit courses for Indigenous students.
16. Close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and focus on indicators such as infant mortality, maternal health, suicide, mental health, addictions, life expectancy, birth rates, infant and child health issues, chronic diseases, illness and injury incidence, and the availability of appropriate health services.
17. Provide an annual transport allowance for Indigenous women in the DTES to be able to travel to their home community.

Band Councils:

18. Women's shelters on reserve should have the option to incorporate as non-profit organizations to receive funding directly from INAC, rather than through band councils, in order to maintain the privacy of those accessing the shelter.
19. Aboriginal governments should provide mandatory training for band councillors and community leaders to ensure that they treat the issue as a high priority.
20. Aboriginal governments should increase funding for education and programs regarding violence prevention directed at children, youth and adults with an emphasis on consent, sexual education and healthy relationships.
21. Aboriginal governments should fund community-based education to ensure that the historical and cultural importance of two-spirit identity is widely understood, supported, and promoted.
22. Aboriginal governments should adopt the principle of equal representation of women in governing councils and decision-making bodies, and introduce pay-equity policies on reserve.

Recommendations to Guarantee Economic Security for Indigenous Women in the DTES

1. Implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.
2. Implement a human rights, Indigenous rights, and gender based analysis in the conception and implementation of all poverty reduction strategies, policies, legislation and decision making.
3. All levels of government must coordinate on an Indigenous specific poverty reduction plan, complete with specific goals, targets, timelines and accountabilities.
4. Implement an Indigenous reparations tax on top of property taxes on residential, commercial and industrial properties, with all revenues going to implementation of an Indigenous poverty reduction plan.
5. Increase the federal Old Age Security (OAS), the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), Canadian Pension Plan (CPP), and BC Seniors Supplement.

6. Provide all residential school survivors with a guaranteed livable income for the rest of their lives.
7. Implementing existing [recommendations](#) from the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition for a whole-of-government poverty reduction strategy.

Provincial Income Assistance:

8. Increase income and disability rates to the Market Basket Measure to reflect the cost of an adequate standard of living, and index them to inflation.
9. Provide grandparents raising grand children, and all kinship care providers, with incomes and benefits comparable to foster parents. This includes a living wage and full access to child care and respite support.
10. Eliminate barriers to accessing income and disability assistance by reducing unnecessary eligibility criteria and simplifying the application processes. This includes:
 - a. Removing the two-year financial independence requirement for income assistance.
 - b. Basing income assistance eligibility on current income only.
 - c. Removing the penalty clawback for failure to work search requirements for income assistance.
 - d. Removing the work search requirement for mothers with children over the age of three years old.
11. Restructure the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, including:
 - a. Bringing back individual caseworkers and timely individualized assistance
 - b. Ensuring there are computers and Ministry support staff at every Ministry office for the purpose of helping applicants.
 - c. Modifying the online application for income assistance so that it is not mandatory to create an email address and BCeID.
12. End clawbacks of income and disability assistance including clawbacks of Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits and penalties for cohabitation.
13. Increase earnings exemptions for those on provincial income and disability assistance program, and any clawbacks must be incrementally tied to income.
14. Raise all asset limitations for those on income assistance to bring them in line with asset limitations for those on disability benefits.

15. Amend income and disability benefits assessments so that only relationships that display significant financial dependence or interdependence are relevant for the purposes of eligibility, and remove financial interdependence by default on the basis that a person indicates parental role for a child unless a spousal relationship can be established.
16. No reduction of welfare for families in case of child apprehension, so that income support and housing is maintained while mothers are in the process of getting their children back.
17. Allow recipients of income assistance to remain on income assistance while attending post-secondary education.
18. Provide income supports to youth transiting out of government care until the age of 25 years, regardless of whether or not they are employed or in school.
19. Remove the age cap and the two-year eligibility requirement for income assistance for the Tuition Waiver Program for youth aging out of care.
20. Eliminate the prohibition on accessing Rental Assistance Program (RAP) and Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) housing subsidies for people on income and disability assistance.
21. Extend coverage for health supplements for people accessing income or disability assistance, such as counselling services that are particularly relevant for Indigenous women.

Employment Security:

22. Increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by January 2019 for all workers with no exemptions, and increase it annually till it reaches a living wage that matches the cost of living.
23. Free skills training, retraining, and apprenticeships for Indigenous women in the DTES.
24. Rectify Indigenous women's exclusion from the economy by:
 - a. Developing equitable and inclusive hiring policy and standards.
 - b. Creating a diversity of low-barrier jobs in the DTES with priority hiring and support for Indigenous women of the community.
 - c. Creating peer-based employment programs including navigation positions throughout the housing, mental health, substance use and income support systems.
 - d. Ensuring Indigenous women peer workers are paid a living wage, have full benefits, and have the right to unionization.
 - e. Creating jobs that value and compensate skills such as weaving, beading, drum making, food harvesting, and traditional healing, and support the creation of an Indigenous women's cooperative in the DTES.

- f. Improving employment supports and workplace accommodations for Indigenous women who are single parents and/or in recovery to ensure that they are not setup to fail in their employment due to systemic barriers.
25. Expand the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model for all employment support programs.
 26. Recognize the role and contribution of volunteers in the DTES, and create accredited volunteer programs to transfer skills and enable access to employment opportunities.
 27. All levels of government should pay living wages to all direct and contracted government employees, and encourage other employers to do the same.
 28. Enact stand-alone proactive pay equity legislation that requires public and private sector employers to pay women equal pay for work of equal value.
 29. Restore the coverage and enforcement of employment standards at the Employment Standards Branch including effective proactive investigations and enforcement for wage theft and other employment violations, and providing benefits such as paid sick leave to all workers.

Universal Public Services:

30. Guarantee a free and culturally appropriate child care system for all Indigenous families, including families awaiting kinship care placements. Child care must accommodate families' diverse schedules, be available to children of all needs and abilities, and must be independent from child welfare services.
31. Universal public healthcare coverage to include supplements, prescriptions, counselling, dental, optical, mobility devices, adaptive equipment, and alternative treatments like acupuncture.
32. Guarantee free and extended transportation:
 - a. Free transit pass for children ages 0-18 years old, all youth transitioning out of government care till the age of 25, and for all adults on pensions, income assistance, and disability assistance.
 - b. Expand public transit, including HandyDart and community-based passenger van programs.
 - c. Access to free transportation to and from medical appointments, especially for those with disabilities and the elderly.
33. Implement better educational supports:
 - a. Expansion of the Head Start program for Indigenous families.
 - b. Guarantee a school breakfast and lunch food program in all public schools that is free, nutritious and culturally diverse.

- c. More Indigenous-focused schools with Indigenous teachers, Indigenous-based educational methodology and curriculum, and that is supportive to urban Indigenous students needs and contexts.

34. Free post-secondary tuition:

- a. Free tuition for all post-secondary education for all Indigenous women and girls.
- b. Eliminate all interest on existing student loans for Indigenous women and girls.
- c. Under the Single Parents Employment Initiative, extend tuition coverage to multi-year degrees and training programs and remove the restricted list of eligible careers and programs.

35. Adoption of low-income customer rates and rules by BC Hydro and all energy providers including waiver of security deposits, late payment fees, and reconnection fees; more flexible payment arrangements; and suspension of disconnections during cold weather and for people with medical conditions.

Recommendations for Safe and Affordable Housing for Indigenous Women in the DTES:

1. The *Definition of Indigenous homelessness in Canada* should form the basis of all policies on housing and homelessness with appropriate solutions to homelessness that integrates land, culture, belonging and kinship networks.
2. Comprehensive federal, provincial, and municipal Indigenous Housing policy framework to specifically address Indigenous homelessness in Canadian cities.
3. Change government definitions of social housing and affordable housing to mean rates that are affordable to people on social assistance, and rents that are income-geared not market-geared.
4. Funding initiatives to end homelessness must be more inclusive of Indigenous women. Implement the existing recommendations of [Homes 4 Women](#) and [Women's Shelters Canada](#) on making homeless initiatives and funding structures more gender-equal.
5. Federal funding for homelessness needs to go beyond Housing First initiatives to better suit the diverse needs of Indigenous women. Housing First funding must also have less eligibility criteria and longer timelines.
6. Extend the provincial Shelter Allowance for Elderly Renters (SAFER) to housing charges in non-profit cooperative housing, and extend SAFER grants to the amount of rent increases.

Build Social Housing and Transition Homes:

7. Immediately build 10,000 affordable social housing units per year in B.C., with an additional 1000 units each year. These units must be self-contained units of at least 400 square feet with bathrooms and kitchens.

8. A minimum of 30 percent of all units funded by the current National Housing Strategy and the various Building BC Housing Funds must be designated to Indigenous women and families and be operated by Indigenous housing providers.
9. Any new social housing must consider the needs of Indigenous women, such as adequate space for children and extended families, cooperative housing models, accommodating cultural and ceremonial practices, equipped for mobility devices and accessibility for elders, and with integrated services such as child care, free laundry, and programming on-site.
10. Highest priority for social housing should be given to Indigenous women fleeing violence and Indigenous mothers at risk of child apprehension.
11. Provide Indigenous women with individualized options for housing that supports choice and self-determination. For example, women should have the option to live in or outside of the DTES, for abstinence-based or harm reduction-based buildings, for women-only or housing that includes men, for housing that is with or without increased security and guest rules.
12. Open more transition homes and low-barrier shelters that are for Indigenous women-only.
13. Fund more Indigenous housing outreach workers and advocates.
14. All supportive housing and shelter providers should prioritize Indigenous women's participation in service delivery, as well as prioritize Indigenous women as peer workers, staff and managers.

Legislative Protections:

15. The provincial *Residential Tenancy Act* needs to be amended as follows:
 - a. The Act must cover all housing, including residents of social housing, non-profit SRO's, supportive housing, and temporary modular housing. People living in supportive housing should not be subjected to restrictive rules that violate their basic tenancy rights.
 - b. The Act must tie rent to the unit, not the tenant, so landlords cannot renovict tenants to increase rents. The Act must also tie landlord rights to increase rent with obligations to maintain property and to comply with orders made by the Residential Tenancy Branch.
 - c. Extend the 'right of first refusal' to tenants to return at their renovated unit at the previously payable rent in order to prevent renovictions. Also extend right of first refusal to all tenants, not just those living in residential complexes of more than 5 units.
 - d. When evicting a tenant on grounds that the landlord or a close family member intends to move in, require the landlord to file a statutory declaration indicating their relationship to the family member and that they intend to occupy the unit for at least six months.
 - e. Extend the grace period for non-payment of rent to twenty days, eliminate the Direct Request Process for non-payment of rent, and allow arbitrators discretion to consider contextual factors and refuse an order of possession for failure to pay rent.

- f. Provide tenants the right to a warning before getting an eviction notice for cause and require automatic dispute resolution hearings for all evictions, where landlords initiate eviction proceedings by applying with the Residential Tenancy Branch in order to receive a registered eviction notice and schedule a mandatory hearing.
 - g. Develop a property maintenance policy that outlines a breadth of health, safety and security standards.
 - h. Create more robust enforcement mechanisms at the Residential Tenancy Branch to stop fraudulent evictions and to ensure landlords are adhering to maintenance obligations, amend criteria and lower the threshold for accepting investigation requests, increase the deadlines and expands the grounds for Review Consideration, and introduce a wider breadth of penalties that are imposed more often.
16. Landlords and property managers must be licensed and make licenses revocable in cases of significant misconduct.
 17. An annual audit of all landlords and property managers to track refusal of housing and housing discrimination.
 18. Amend the provincial *Human Rights Code* and *Residential Tenancy Act* to make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of social condition including health status and drug use.
 19. Legalize tent cities and mobile home parks.
 20. Amend the City of Vancouver *Single Room Accommodation* bylaw to define SRO conversion to mean raising rents above income assistance-shelter rates. Include zero–eviction conditions in all renovation and building permits.
 21. Stop market housing development in the DTES to preserve land for social housing. Once adequate social housing is built, abide by the City of Vancouver’s 1:1 rate of change principle.
 22. All levels of government must buy or lease SRO hotels to prevent them from gentrifying and pushing out low-income residents.

Recommendations to Keep Indigenous Families Together in the DTES

1. Implementation of and full funding for federal Indigenous Child Welfare legislation that is attentive to specific First Nations, Metis and Inuit needs. Ensure that Indigenous nations resume sole jurisdiction, and not simply service delivery, over child welfare for child-members of the nation who are on reserve and off reserve. This is in accordance with the *United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
2. In full partnership with First Nations, INAC must immediately:
 - a. Fully redress the inequities and structural problems of funding for First Nations children.

- b. Support funding and policy options proposed by First Nations for child and family services.
 - c. Ensure that a formal compliance and reporting program be established specifically for the First Nations Child and Family Services Program.
3. We applaud the work of Dr. Cindy Blackstock and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and call on the federal government to comply with the legally-binding orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to:
- a. Immediately and fully apply Jordan’s principle to all First Nations children living on and off reserve.
 - b. Apply Jordan’s principle based on the need of the child and not limited to the normative standard of care.
 - c. Ensure that administrative delays do not delay service provision and respond to most cases within 48 hours.
4. Implement the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Actions on Child Welfare, recommendations](#) in *Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness and Reunification – From Root Causes to Root Solutions* by Special Advisor Grand Chief Ed John, and [recommendations](#) in *Calling Forth Our Future: Options for the Exercise of Indigenous Peoples’ Authority in Child Welfare* by the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

End Child Apprehensions:

- 5. End the apprehension of Indigenous children due to poverty or Eurocentric ideas of neglect that stem from a legacy of colonization. Poverty must not be conflated with neglect or mistreatment, and removing children from their families exacerbates cycles of trauma and poverty.
- 6. Immediately disallow apprehensions of Indigenous babies at birth and while they are still breastfeeding.
- 7. Prohibit the placement of Indigenous children into non-Indigenous foster and adoptive families, and regularly report on how many Indigenous children are in government care and how many are being placed in non-Indigenous homes.
- 8. The provincial government must immediately review the care plans for all Indigenous children and youth currently in care and involve their Indigenous communities, especially extended family members and elders, in the care plan.

Support Indigenous Families:

- 9. Making funds available for non-Indigenous foster care services but not for supporting Indigenous families perpetuates the detrimental cycle of apprehension. Increase available supports and preventative services for mothers and families.

10. Ensure families are able to maintain an adequate standard of living by raising income assistance and disability rates, ensuring safe and affordable housing, and guaranteeing food and transit allowances.
11. Increase financial amounts provided to caregivers under MCFD's Home of a Relative program.
12. Guaranteed free and culturally appropriate child care and early childhood education for all children on and off reserve, with adequate staffing ratios and support for children with special needs.
13. Provide individualized support such as culturally appropriate parenting programs; detox on demand; and counselling for mothers with mental health diagnoses, learning disabilities, drug use dependence, and who are survivors of domestic violence.
14. Enforce the Ministry mandate of supporting - not surveiling - families. Voluntary disclosures of personal information in order to seek support must not be used as a reason to remove children.
15. Social workers must increase communication with families about what is being investigated, clear expectations about timelines and goals, and file status.
16. Frequent family visits and family reunification must be always be the top priority and never delayed due to MCFD's own bureaucratic inefficiencies. Social workers must not be allowed to cancel family visits without written authorization from the Director.
17. Culturally appropriate family liaison workers and parenting supports.
18. Implement existing recommendations by the Fostering Change Initiative and [First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition](#). In particular:
 - a. Remove eligibility restrictions and increase financial and other supports for youth and young people on Youth Agreements and Agreements with Young Adults. Agreements with Young Adults should be increased to at least \$1400 per month with no clawbacks.
 - b. Remove the maximum number of months during which young people are eligible to remain on Agreements with Young Adults.
 - c. Extend the age till 25 years old for how long MCFD should support young people as they transition into adulthood and continue to receive housing, food, transit, cultural and other financial supports.
 - d. Remove the age limit to be eligible for free post-secondary tuition and eliminate the requirement of months in care to be eligible for free post-secondary tuition.

Accountability:

19. Train and hire more Indigenous social workers and ensure that all social workers are culturally-competent, committed to decolonizing practices, have better communication skills, and are educated about and sensitive to the intergenerational trauma of family separation.

20. Fund and guarantee independent Indigenous family advocates who can advocate for mothers and families in their dealings with MCFD.
21. Require that all child welfare decision makers and the courts must mandatorily consider the impact of the residential school experience on children and their caregivers.
22. An independent and external process for complaints, oversight, and accountability for MCFD neglect investigations, decisions to apprehend children, and for deaths of children and youth in government care.

Recommendations to End Criminalization of Indigenous Women in the DTES

1. All levels of government must recognize the inherent and constitutionally protected right of Indigenous people to establish and control Indigenous justice systems. All levels of government must also fund the establishment of Indigenous law institutes to support the restoration and advancement of Indigenous legal systems.
2. Redirect growing municipal, provincial, and federal police and prison budgets towards solutions that increase safety for Indigenous women such as more housing, child care, income, healthcare, mental health and addictions services, and healing supports.
3. Implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's [Calls to Action](#) on Justice for Indigenous Peoples.

Policing:

4. As in [other jurisdictions](#), prohibit the police from carrying and using all lethal weapons. Even in the most escalated scenario, there is no justification for a police-involved lethal shooting.
5. Eliminate the use of VPD restraint devices, such as the hobble restraint device, and end the use of police dogs as weapons.
6. Eliminate searches and monitoring of Indigenous women and girls by male police officers.
7. Immediate independent investigation into the VPD practice of street checks with the goal of ending street checks.
8. Reduce the number of bylaw infraction tickets issued by VPD in the DTES.
9. Develop guidelines to facilitate greater use of police discretion not to lay charges especially for minor poverty-related offences.
10. Ensure that that all policing practices conform to the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act*.
11. All police forces should implement Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines similar to those in Vancouver that support the safety of sex workers in police interactions.

12. Expand non-policing options for publicly intoxicated people, including civilian-operated 24 hour sobering centers providing appropriate care for Indigenous women.
13. Make it easier to file a police complaint and establish an independent civilian watchdog that conducts investigations of reported incidents of serious police misconduct, including allegations of police violence and sexual assault. Increase liability for the misconduct of police officers to include criminal charges.
14. Allow the provincial Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner to initiate its own systemic investigations or hearings, and shift investigations of misconduct within the jurisdiction of the Police Complaint Commissioner to investigations directly by the Commissioner.
15. Implement existing [recommendations](#) by Human Rights Watch in *Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada*.

Legal and Judicial Reform:

16. End the counter-charging and criminalization of Indigenous women who defend themselves or their children from abuse and violence.
17. Repeal all mandatory minimum prison sentences for non-violent offences and implement legislation to allow trial judges to depart from mandatory minimum sentences and restrictions on the use of conditional sentences.
18. Repeal laws that criminalize or increase harm for women in the sex trade.
19. End the criminalization of people who use or possess small amounts of illicit substances.
20. End the criminalization of homelessness by eliminating bylaw infractions and criminal charges for sleeping or tenting in public spaces, and end the displacement of tent cities.
21. End transit fare evasion ticketing.
22. Repeal the mandatory imposition of the victim fine surcharge and give judges the discretion to waive the fine for those unable to pay it.
23. Reform the drug treatment court process so as to not require a guilty plea to access the program.
24. Increase the ways in which failures to appear and other violations can be quashed early in the judicial process and take proactive steps to clear bench warrants for Indigenous women.
25. Legislation should require Gladue factors to be used as mitigating factors only, unless the victim is an Indigenous woman in which case her wishes should take precedence over an offender.

Access to Justice:

26. All levels of government must commit to using non-incarceration measures especially for poverty-related minor offenses. Governments must also provide sufficient and stable funding to Indigenous

communities and organizations to provide alternatives to incarceration including community-based rehabilitation, diversion, community courts, and restorative justice methods geared towards Indigenous women.

27. Fund an Indigenous legal clinic in the DTES that can support Indigenous women in all legal matters and provide regular legal education workshops.
28. Increase Indigenous women's access to justice by extending funding to guarantee all Indigenous women have access to full legal aid for criminal and civil legal matters including family, criminal, mental health, and poverty legal aid.
29. *Gladue* is a legal requirement. All levels of government have an obligation to ensure that all Indigenous women in the DTES have timely, appropriate and high-quality access to Gladue reports when involved in the criminal justice system.
30. Expand the number and scope of courts like B.C.'s First Nations Court that emphasize healing plans over punishment.
31. Expand funding for community-based and court-based victim services.
32. Prioritize funding to train Indigenous legal advocates, court workers, and lawyers including through increased funding and capacity for Indigenous court worker programs and initiatives under the Indigenous Justice Program.
33. The Federation of Law Societies of Canada, law schools in Canada, and the Canadian Judicial Council must provide mandatory training to all law students, lawyers and judges on the legacy of residential schools, Canada's obligations under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Indigenous legal traditions, Gladue principles, and the systemic failure of colonial legal systems to uphold justice for Indigenous people.
34. Implement existing [recommendations](#) of the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission.
35. Implement existing [recommendations](#) in *Justice Reform for British Columbia* by Community Legal Assistance Society, Pivot Legal Society, West Coast LEAF and B.C. Civil Liberties Association.

Correctional Facilities:

36. Full decarceration of Indigenous women in the federal and provincial corrections system. No Indigenous woman should ever be sentenced into a colonial system.

In the immediate, a number of necessary reforms can drastically reduce the incarceration rates of Indigenous women:

37. Increased resourcing, capacity and funding for section 81 Healing Lodges. Indigenous nations and urban Indigenous organizations must be able to operate Healing Lodges on a long-term basis and with full wrap-around supports. Change the policy of not allowing women with maximum-security classifications to be at CSC-operated healing lodges and increase access to all healing lodges.

38. Increased resources, capacity and funding for section 84 agreements so that Indigenous nations are compensated and can provide full support for Indigenous women seeking section 84 releases. Indigenous communities and organizations should exercise control and self-determination in the development and implementation of reintegration plans.
39. Start all Indigenous women prisoners at a minimum-security level and remove the requirement to automatically incarcerate Indigenous women in a maximum-security facility for the first two years of a murder sentence.
40. End the current classification scale and reassess all Indigenous women currently classified at the maximum-security level using a gender and culturally-responsive classification tool.
41. The test for security classification under s. 18 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Regulations* should be amended to eliminate institutional adjustment as criteria for a higher classification level.
42. End the placement of Indigenous women in solitary confinement in all prisons and establish an independent external review of all Indigenous women in segregation placements.
43. Increase supports for Indigenous women on conditional release, particularly through income assistance, employment, counselling and child care. Permit conditional release options that facilitate Indigenous women to be housed with their children.
44. All day-to-day programs and services at remand, provincial and federal facilities must be accessible, timely, and long term with the goal of decarceration and successful reintegration. Access must be unconditional, not contingent on classification, and not withdrawn as a punitive or disciplinary measure. Guaranteed programs and services must include:
 - a. Independent prison legal services
 - b. Independent healthcare in accordance with the U.N. Mandela rules including 24/7 appropriate healthcare; mental health counselling; access to gender-affirming surgery; detox on demand; heroin-assisted and injectable hydromorphone treatment; and safe needle exchange and tattooing program.
 - c. Culturally appropriate and non-punitive healing programs that understand physical, mental, spiritual and sexual traumas as intergenerational collective traumas caused by colonization.
 - d. Free phone calls.
 - e. Nutritious food.
 - f. Library, reading materials, and computer literacy.
 - g. Increased visitation, including increased hours, more opportunities for physical contact, and decreased security checks for visitors.
 - h. Access to meaningful employment and increase prisoner pay.

- i. Support for release planning.
45. Establish alternatives to correctional facilities for all mothers who are primary caregivers or expected to give birth while in prison. In the immediate, implement child-friendly mother-child units in all correctional facilities so no child is separated from their mother.
 46. For women who do not have primary custody of their children, prioritize the social bond between incarcerated mothers and their children. This includes:
 - a. Funding for families to cover the costs and logistics of transportation for visits and child-friendly practices during visitation including visitation hours scheduled after school hours, no body searches of children, and allowance for physical contact.
 - b. Visitation outside the prison setting.
 - c. Free and unlimited phone calls and introduce video calling technologies, in addition to the right to open in-person visits.
 - d. Family reunification as a priority post-release by providing all the necessary supports including housing, child care, and parenting support.
 47. Implement existing [recommendations](#) in the Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, *A Call to Action: Reconciliation with Indigenous Women in the Federal Justice and Correctional Systems*.

Recommendations for Indigenous Women’s Wellness in the DTES

1. All levels of government must acknowledge that the current state of Indigenous women’s health is a direct result of colonialism and government policies.
2. Strengthen all the social determinants of Indigenous women’s health by ensuring access to and governance over land, culture, language, housing, child care, income security, employment, education, and safety.
3. Access to affordable and nutritious foods especially fruits, vegetables and meat in the DTES. This means more community gardens, food banks, non-profit grocery stores, and providing discount cards for regular super markets.
4. End the health risks associated with living in the DTES by ensuring healthy environments and built-environments in all buildings, residences and outdoors. This includes the right to:
 - a. Clean air and clean streets.
 - b. Green space and urban ecological systems.
 - c. Sanitation.
 - d. Accessible and clean public washrooms.
 - e. Potable water.
 - f. Functioning water fountains and more access to water sources.

Culturally safe healthcare:

5. An Indigenous Health and Wellness Centre in the DTES and more Indigenous-run health programs that use Indigenous methods and medicines to address physical, mental, sexual, emotional, and spiritual harms.
6. End the coerced sterilization of Indigenous women, and hold health professionals criminally responsible for acts of coerced sterilization.
7. End the medical pathologizing and diagnosing of gender identity. Train healthcare professionals to provide gender-affirming care that is safe for and respectful of trans women and two-spirit people.
8. Reframe mental health and addictions services so they mirror Indigenous women's social and economic realities and aspirations towards healing.
9. All healthcare workers must believe Indigenous women and treat them as credible experts about their own health.
10. All medical and nursing schools in Canada must require courses dealing with Indigenous health issues, including the legacy of colonialism and its impacts, as well as skills-based training in anti-racism, human rights, and trauma-informed care.
11. More doctors and nurses, and especially more Indigenous healthcare professionals.
12. Recognize Indigenous healing practices and have more health professionals trained in Indigenous health practices. Recognize the role of Indigenous reproductive, pregnancy and birthing knowledge, including ceremonies related to healthy sexual development.
13. Opportunities for urban Indigenous women to learn traditional and land-based healing practices and develop peer-based holistic health support programs and activities such as regular opportunities to go canoeing, pick medicines, and harvest foods.
14. More Indigenous patient navigators and Indigenous medicine people in hospitals to bridge between Indigenous patients and the Western medical system.
15. More Indigenous healing spaces and sacred spaces in hospitals and hospices.
16. Social workers in hospitals need to ensure wrap-around support, including financial, housing, and social support, before discharging Indigenous women from hospitals.
17. Hospitals including security guards need to be welcoming and supportive, not judgmental and criminalizing, in their interactions with Indigenous patients.
18. Security guards and all emergency room healthcare providers and staff must receive mandatory training in cultural sensitivity, mental health, and de-escalation.

Expanded health services:

19. Universal public healthcare coverage to include supplements, prescriptions, counselling, dental, optical, mobility devices, adaptive equipment, and alternative treatments like acupuncture.
20. Expanded access to free transportation to and from medical appointments especially for those with disabilities and the elderly.
21. Expand home support, residential care services, and the number of residential care beds.
22. More mobile healthcare vans and community-based clinics, street nurses, and healthcare providers in the DTES.
23. Ensure timely, culturally safe, and evidence-based mental health and addiction services in the DTES, ranging from prevention, early intervention, treatment, crisis care, home visits, and aftercare.
24. Guarantee a 24/7 mental health and addictions counselling program that is low-barrier, drop-in based, available on demand, and includes overnight street-based counselling in the DTES.
25. Declare the opioid crisis a national public health emergency that disproportionately impacts Indigenous women, and expand funding for immediate health-based solutions for the opioid crisis that focus on the specific needs of Indigenous women. This includes:
 - a. Full spectrum of recovery supports including immediate access to Indigenous women's detox-on-demand and treatment centers.
 - b. Indigenous-run treatment centers that use culture as treatment with Indigenous healing methods and land-based practices.
 - c. More indoor overdose prevention sites and consumption sites, including culturally safe sites for Indigenous women only.
 - d. Decriminalization and access to safer drug supply.
 - e. Opioid-assisted therapy programs and full spectrum of substitution treatment options.
 - f. Longer-term funding for range of culturally safe treatment programs.
 - g. Provincial regulation and oversight over all recovery programs and facilities.
26. Ensure that people with mental health and/or substance use-related disabilities have a means to enforce their human rights related to accessing and maintaining their housing and employment.
27. Replace the deemed consent provisions of the *Mental Health Act* and the consent override provisions of the *Healthcare (Consent) and Care Facility (Admission) Act* and the *Representation Agreement Act* with a legislative mechanism that protects and respects the patient's autonomy in making healthcare decisions and allows the patient to include trusted family members and friends in their treatment and recovery process.
28. Create legislative standards regulating the use of isolation in mental health facilities and the use of physical, mechanical, environmental, and chemical restraints against mental health patients to ensure compliance with *Charter* rights.