

## **BRIEFING NOTE**

**TO: UBCIC EXECUTIVE AND WOMEN'S REPRESENTATIVE MELISSA MOSES**  
**FROM: UBCIC POLICY TEAM**  
**DATE: JUNE 18, 2021**  
**RE: BC'S PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON MMIWG**

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### **PURPOSE**

To provide an update and analysis of [A Path Forward: Priorities and Early Strategies for B.C \(Path Forward\)](#), the provincial response to the [National Action Plan](#) to End Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, 2SPBGTTQIA+ people that was released on June 3, 2021 by the federal government.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. UBCIC staff to table a letter with Canada and BC outlining issues with the NAP and Path Forward plans, calling for immediate action and timelines for implementation, and the meaningful inclusion of impacted Indigenous women, family members, and Indigenous women's organizations.
2. As a part of the National S-3 Working Group and the Coalition, continue to pressure Canada for immediate action to implement Bill S-3, to eliminate remaining sex-based inequities in the Indian Act, and to provide redress and restitution for Indigenous women and their descendants.
3. The Coalition on MMIWG2S to meet with Government of BC to discuss and advance highlighted concerns around the provincial response to the National Action Plan.

### **BACKGROUND**

In June of 2019, the National Inquiry on MMIWG released their final report, "Reclaiming Power and Place", which included 231 Calls for Justice. The federal [National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) responds to the National Inquiry's Call for Justice 1.1, which calls upon Federal, Provincial, Territorial, Municipal and Indigenous governments to develop and implement a National Action Plan to address violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Prior to the release of the National Inquiry's Final Report in 2019, the Province of BC recognized its critical role in addressing the systemic causes of violence and subsequently committed to developing a path forward to ending violence in partnership with survivors, family members, leaders and community members. The Province supported twelve Indigenous-led community dialogue sessions in 2019 and 2021 to inform its work on a path forward that was guided by four core principles: people centred, healing centred, reciprocal, and community driven and community building.

The sessions were led by Elaine Alec of Alderhill Planning Inc. and took place in Merritt, Prince George, Williams Lake, Fort St. John, Haida Gwaii, Cranbrook, Terrace, Smithers, Nanaimo, Port Hardy, Harrison Hot Springs, and Vancouver. The dialogue sessions identified four key themes that articulate the Province's priorities including Safe Spaces and Safety Plans, Healing Support, Strengthening

Relationships with Partners, and Access to Resources and Recommendations. The current strategies and foundational actions that comprise the Province's Path Forward has been shaped by these dialogue sessions and the feedback provided by participants.

## CURRENT STATUS

Alongside the release of its provincial plan, BC announced that it is making an initial investment of up to \$5.5 million in 2021-22 to support its response to the NAP, with additional investments under consideration. Funding will go toward prioritized areas that include:

- Supporting First Nations capacity to develop safety plans, developing 2SLGBTQIA+ training and education resources for the public service, and commemorating and honouring of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples who have gone missing or been murdered, and their family members
- Cell service along highway 16 and transportation in northern BC
- Mental health and homeless strategy
- Sexual assault response
- Police reform and creation of a hate crimes unit
- An action plan required under the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' Act*
- A review of anti-racism laws and introduction of a new *Anti-racism Act*

### **Overview of Provincial Priorities**

On April 7, 2021 BC announced that the federal [Universal Broadband](#) fund will provide Rogers \$4.5 million towards the \$11.6 million cost of providing continuous cellular coverage along 252 kilometers of Highway 16, including 12 cellular towers and three rest stops, which are estimated to be completed in 2022. The province will also expand the BC Bus North Program to service northern BC communities. This transportation network comes after decades of murder and disappearance of Indigenous women in rural northern communities and the cancellation of Grey Hound Bus service in BC.

BC's Path Forward identifies community-based mental health training as a priority, as well as implementing a homeless strategy with complex care, accelerating the opioid crisis response, intervention circles in Indigenous communities to provide service professionals to identify early detections of risk and mobilize intervention, and a standardized sexual health response including training for police, the crown, justice, and the establishment of core funding for sexual assault centres. In May 2020, the province announced \$10 million and an additional \$10 million in 2021 to support the delivery of coordinated emergency sexual assault response services including trauma informed and culturally appropriate services. This funding went to 23 organizations across the province, half of which were under the Indigenous Services stream.

Policing is noted in BC's Path Forward including priorities to address systemic racism, to create a hate crimes units within the police, to review police training and to respond to the final report from the special committee on reforming the *Police Act*, set to be tabled on April 28, 2022.

## ANALYSIS

Like the federal National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, BC's *Path Forward* lacks concrete actions and definitive timelines, lacks an adequate implementation strategy and lacked an appropriate

consultation and inclusion of Indigenous women, Indigenous-led organizations, and experiential women groups in the development stages of the plan. Much like the federal National Action Plan, it identifies key priorities to be addressed without offering steps for implementation.

Concerningly, some of the key priorities identified in The Path Forward are simply a reiteration of provincial commitments already underway elsewhere, such as a commitment to delivering an action plan required under the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' Act*; to draw from the In Plain Sight Recommendations; to conduct a review of anti-racism laws and introduce a new *Anti-racism Act*; and creating a dedicated secretariat by the end of 2021 to coordinate the government's efforts to ensure new legislation and policies are consistent with the UN Declaration.

The Provincial Pathway lacks urgency in responding to the crisis of MMIWG and reads as a repackaging of previous mandates from 2019 and 2020. It presents as "Building on existing actions to address systemic violence, which are highlighted throughout this document, the Province has identified key commitments that align early strategies to community priorities" (16). Much like the National Action Plan, BC's response is characterized overall by inaction and a bureaucratic response to genocide. The inaction and lack of clear timelines is in direct opposition to the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice and the province's commitment to the Declaration Act.

The Coalition on MMIWG2S met with Ministers Farnworth and Mark on April 8, 2021, sent a follow up letter on May 18 citing concerns with the provincial process, and invited the Province to provide updates to the Coalition on the BC Path Forward plan. The Coalition has yet to receive a response.

The approach of the Province to wait for the federal National Action Plan to determine its priorities has wasted time that could have been used to advance the health and safety of Indigenous women in BC. Numerous calls for action from the National Inquiry into MMIWG, the TRC, the Highway of Tears Symposium, the Red Woman Rising Report, and the Oppal Inquiry fall within provincial jurisdiction.

BC's Pathway Forward requires a stronger commitment to police reform given the harms of systemic racism that continue to be perpetrated at the hands of police and the RCMP. While the creation of a hate crimes unit, training for officers, and a review of wellness check procedure are relevant steps, more urgent action is required. Indigenous people and people of colour continue to be met with racism by police, including racial profiling, violence during wellness checks and general disregard when reporting disappearances of Indigenous women and girls. Maxwell Johnson and his twelve-year-old granddaughter were subjected to racist, wrongful detention by the VPD at a Vancouver BMO branch in December 2020 and the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation has suffered six police shootings of their members in the last year alone. These incidences prove that surface-level cultural sensitivity training is not enough to stem the tide of racialized and biased policing, and efforts must be made to substantively reform the policing system and *Police Act*, as called for by the FNLC in Written Submission to the Special Committee on Reforming the *Police Act*.<sup>1</sup> Given the long history of colonial violence by the police and the seriousness of ongoing police shootings of Indigenous people throughout BC, a firm commitment to systemic overhaul is required immediately.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

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<sup>1</sup> April 30, 2021.

1. UBCIC staff to re-send letter inviting Minister Mark to act as the provincial lead on the file of gender-based violence in BC.
2. UBCIC Staff to contact Elaine Alec at Alderhill Planning Inc. to request transparency around who was represented in the provincial and federal Action Plan engagement sessions.
3. UBCIC staff to prepare briefing note on BC's Path Forward for the Coalition on MMIWG.

## **APPENDICES**

### ***1.1 BC Path Forward Dialogue Session Discussion Questions***

To explore this, we presented the four core streams (Safe Spaces and Safety Plans, Healing Support, Strengthening Relationships with Our Partners, and Access to Resources and Recommendations) and offered the following seven questions for discussion:

1. Do these themes related to the systemic causes of violence reflect the challenges and opportunities in your communities? Can you provide examples?
2. What are some of the examples of where support to communities can assist them reduce risk to women and girls? What might that look like?
3. In thinking about the work of eliminating violence in our communities, what roles are there to play? Who needs to be involved in this work?
4. Where are these barriers to success? Even with additional resources or community capacity, where might challenges remain and how could they be addressed?
5. Where are community capacity and resources needed to start addressing systemic causes?
6. What steps need to be taken to address the systemic racism and violence faced by our women, girls and 2SLGBTQQA+ people?
7. If you were asked to design a model for your community, with funds for community development and capacity to address systemic racism and the root causes of violence, what would this model look like? What is required?