

# Statement on Indigenous Women

HOME » ABOUT US » POSITION STATEMENTS » STATEMENT ON INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Two of our core values focus on Indigenous women:

- Recognizing and honouring the history and experiences of Indigenous women
- Supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls for action, especially the improvement of Indigenous health and health care services, the justice system, and child welfare

HIV has an enormous impact on Indigenous people in Canada, especially women. Indigenous women have **disproportionate rates of HIV** and are diagnosed at younger ages than non-Indigenous women. This is because Indigenous women are more vulnerable to HIV due to experiences of **violence**, poverty, and lack of access to relevant sexual health information. We agree with the writers of **HIV Prevention for Aboriginal Women**, who emphasize taking into account the “structural determinants of health inequalities” that affect Indigenous women’s day-to-day realities. All of these issues impact health, community, and cultural wellness.

We respect the roles of Indigenous women in challenging the far-reaching negative effects of colonialism and honour their resilience and leadership in moving forward.

Indigenous people live with a history of governmental policies and decisions that have produced cultural destruction, racism, discrimination, violence, sexism, trauma, and genocide. Mistrust in colonial institutions is valid and healthcare professionals must start to build safety for Indigenous people accessing health services. The **residential school and Indian hospital systems** attempted to break the family and community connections of generations of Indigenous people, and there is a lot of work going into restoring communities.

We strive to respond and honour the needs of PWN’s Indigenous members by creating the space and time to develop meaningful, culturally relevant and appropriate support services, resources, and education. We respect women’s choices about their connection to the **Indigenous wellness framework**, which includes mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

PWN is committed to supporting activities and community partnerships that address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action released in 2015. The commission’s **calls to action** fall into several areas that intersect with our work:

- Health: improve care and outcomes in terms of chronic diseases, addictions, and mental health
- Legal system: reduce violence against Indigenous people, along with their overrepresentation in justice and correctional systems
- Child welfare: strengthen family and community support and place fewer Indigenous children in care

We also wish to honour the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People**. Articles 21 through 24 are especially related to our work:

- The right to improved social determinants of health overall
- The rights to self-determination of health and social services and equal access to the highest possible standards of physical and mental health
- The rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities
- The rights of Indigenous women and children to be safe from discrimination and violence

Reversing the effects of generational trauma takes energy and support. Recognizing racism and the negative effects of colonialization is necessary to establish culturally appropriate programs and services informed by Indigenous women’s needs. By honouring the experiences of Indigenous women and working towards the calls to action, PWN strives to contribute to the process of reconciliation while supporting Indigenous women’s decisions about what is most beneficial to their health and healing.

## Further Reading

- [Environments of Nurturing Safety: Aboriginal Women in Canada five year strategy 2010-2015](#)
- [First Nations Perspective on Wellness](#), First Nations Health Authority
- [First Nations Health Authority Wellness Approach: Everyone is a Wellness Champion](#)
- [Red Road HIV/ AIDS Network](#) (BC based)
- [Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network](#) (National)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#)
- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#)





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Your **generous contribution** makes it possible for us to continue to provide services that have a positive impact on women living with or vulnerable to HIV and/or HCV. Participating in this way shows people living with HIV and hepatitis C that they are not alone.