



**Niagara Chapter - Native Women Inc.**

# Mno Bmaadziwin

LIVING THE GOOD AND HEALTHY LIFE

**COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELLBEING**

**Indigenous Engagements Report**

**Off-Reserve Niagara Region, Canada 2021**

**We are grateful to the following Indigenous agencies for their participation with this initiative: promotion, providing openings, closings and ongoing support.**



**DE OWA DA DEHS NYC-S**  
ABORIGINAL HEALTH CENTRE



**Ganawageh Urban Homes Inc.**  
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**NPAAMB**  
INDIGENOUS  
YOUTH  
EMPLOYMENT  
& TRAINING



This report is prepared for the Region of Niagara, by Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc. the lead agency conducting the Indigenous community engagements.

**We wish to acknowledge our ancestors** of both the Indigenous population and the ancestors of the newcomers to this land, which we call Turtle Island, our homeland. Early connections between our ancestors were once caring, supportive and friendly, resulting in many treaties and alliances being formed, which are still alive and actionable today. These Treaties amongst other things, are known as Indigenous Law. Our Indigenous ancestors ensured we knew our part of these Treaties through what is known as “Oral History”. Through this “Oral History” passed down through generations, we have been able to uphold our agreements made in those Treaties, even with the **“Great Trail of Trauma” (\*1)** that was put upon us and which also has legacies for descendants of newcomers.

When ‘written history’ is recorded by the dominant society, many truths can be omitted, gossamer embellishments can happen and assumptions can erroneously be stated as fact. That is the case with us, the Indigenous people of Turtle Island. The consequences of generations of conflict, legalized oppression, starvation, kidnapping, child abuse, murder and cultural genocide have left us reeling from complete chaos. The fact is, we weren’t supposed to survive. We did and now we are faced with the dilemma of what the newcomers and their descendants have done and are doing to our beautiful homeland, Turtle Island and what they have done to our people.

Descendants of newcomers want to make amends. Generally, they have been left with a legacy of what their forebears have done. It is time to not just “Not repeat the mistakes of the past”. It is time to create something new between us. Something that was meant to be when our ancestors first met.

So as mutual descendants of those earliest ancestors, it is time to jointly acknowledge the poor public policies here in the Region of Niagara. It is time to engage with the Indigenous population as true and equal partners, not **“stakeholders” (\*2)**, but “participating parties”. It is time to actually listen and learn from us. So, with that in mind, we submit this report and trust it will not grace a shelf and collect dust as many reports have. **R.C.A.P. (\*3)** is a good example. If R.C.A.P. had been listened to and actioned,

those 40-50 years ago we would be so much further ahead today. Many of the recommendations have been repeated in subsequent reports, still actioned as of today.

## Original Peoples and Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the rich historical Indigenous relationship to the land in which the Niagara Region engages its work. It was once the homeland of the Neutral Nations who called themselves, Chononton (“Keepers of the Deer”). It has since become the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe Peoples. A historical relationship agreement of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe is bound by the Iroquois-Ojibwa Friendship Belt.

The image below shows two white squares with a white line joining them. The squares symbolize and represent the confederacy of each group, the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, and the white line symbolizes the path of peace between them.



Figure 1: Iroquois-Ojibwa Friendship Belt. Photo credit: Kelly Fran Davis

**Modified Original Peoples and Territorial Acknowledgement Credit: Creating our Way Forward, 2019**

**We wish to acknowledge and applaud the hard work of the ten Indigenous organizations within this Region who assisted with this work.**

**For Niagara Chapter Native Women Inc. it was an honour to be chosen by the N.I.C.E. (Niagara Indigenous Community Executives) to be the lead agency on this important project for our collective responsibility to our Peoples.**

Wendy Sturgeon PAED., MBA, Executive Director, Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc.  
Michelle Johnston MA, Project Manager, Corporate Strategy & Innovation, Niagara Region  
Manvinder Bhamra, MBA., Resource Development, Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc.

## Issue/Topic:

The municipality of Niagara is working on developing a Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan which will address root causes of social issues through a strategic, community-based approach with the local Indigenous community. For further information regarding Niagara's Safety and Well-Being Plan visit [Niagara's CSWB Plan online](https://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/community-safety-well-being/default.aspx) (<https://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/community-safety-well-being/default.aspx>). With the help of Michelle Johnston (Project Manager) of the Regional Municipality of Niagara and Manvinder Bhamra (Resource Development Asst.) of Niagara Chapter – Native Women Inc., input was gathered from off-reserve Indigenous persons about their perspectives on safety and wellbeing while living in the Niagara Region to become part of the overall Niagara Regional Safety and Well Being Plan submitted to the province of Ontario.

## The Tough Words Must Be Stated: Background and the Going Forward – Wendy Sturgeon

Whether due to a history of indifference, a disease prevalent in many societies; apathy, which Helen Keller identified, when speaking of the evils in the world as: ‘... **the worst of them all - the apathy of human beings**’, it is important to begin with the acknowledgement that the Municipal Government, known as the Region of Niagara has not had a strong nor friendly relationship with the local Indigenous community for countless generations on numerous fronts. (This is true with a few exceptions in recent history.) This lack of meaningful acknowledgement, collaboration, respect, and communication was not created by present day individuals but by misguided, old world thinking, over hundreds of years and barbaric, savage practices that put in place torturous, severe, oppressive, genocidal legislation and policies to eliminate the Indigenous people so easy possession of the land and resources could occur.

While the resultant disparities of note today in wealth, education, health outcomes for example, had their birth many generations ago, the disparities have continued to grow as the Indigenous community has been repeatedly left behind. This, even through what one may say are “enlightened times” due to, deeply embedded societal structures fraught with systemic barriers that persist to this day and ongoing racial falsehoods and misconceptions about Indigenous people.

One can only surmise, the fact we survived to unearth the truth, dispel lies told to ancestors, find allies, and see any slight improvements through generations of advocacy is in itself miraculous. So, when there is an opportunity for direct advocacy that can lead to direct action, for the affected individuals such as what is being done now through municipalities, it is important to engage. When what Martin Luther King called “the appalling silence and indifference of the good people” begins to stir, it is time for authenticity, for truth telling, for sitting together and addressing massive issues some would rather turn their blind eyes to.

It is time to more than just do a ‘checking’ of the box on a form.

This is where we are today. A tentative beginning to create an authentic, equally beneficial relationship while acknowledging that both parties do not stand on equal ground. To reconcile generations of distrust and rebalance the harm done by years of discrimination,

broken and false promises, by committing to recognizing the reality of the past.

We have lived, worked and raised our families here since time immemorial; we know, love and cherish this territory where the bones of our ancestors are buried. This is our ancestral homeland. Old practices must be thrown out as we bravely move together towards the vision of a “superior practice.” One based on truth, courage, respect, humility, honesty, love and wisdom.

### Purpose:

The Niagara Indigenous Community Executive Directors (N.I.C.E.) have come together as requested by the Indigenous community. N.I.C.E. has reached out to invite Indigenous community members to join in on the CSWB Engagement Sessions which were planned virtually through Zoom. A total of five sessions were offered between February 16 and March 4 and individuals also had the option to attend over the phone to ensure everyone had access and an equal opportunity to participate. Each organization was asked to invite their members and social media platforms were also used to share the information poster to encourage sign-ups from any and all members of the community. Niagara Chapter – Native Women (NCNW) has taken lead to aid with the delivery and report of this project.



### Process:

Michelle Johnston, Project Manager from the Regional Municipality of Niagara, was the point of contact for the CSWB sessions. Ms. Johnston undertook the responsibility of organizing the Zoom meetings and creating and delivering the CSWB presentation. She also helped design the information flyer which was posted online and recorded responses during each session which are also included in this report.

In addition to Ms. Johnston’s work, Manvinder Bhamra (Resource Developer) from NCNW aided with the creation and distribution of the flyer as well as managed the participants’ sign-up and recorded responses.

The age range of respondents were 16 to 24 years old, 25 to 50 years old, and 51 years old and over. Majority of respondents were in the 25 to 50 year old range with the over 51 range being second, and the 16 to 24 year olds being the least. All respondents were of Indigenous heritage with exception of one. There was a mix of gender including non-binary.

The sessions began with Wendy Sturgeon (Executive Director, NCNW) providing the opening remarks for each session and an Elder starting off with an opening greeting. The term “Wahkohtowin” was shared – a Cree word for relationships, interconnectedness, and the journey of learning from one another in the process which helped set a comfortable environment. From there, Michelle started off the presentation and questions were presented one by one for participants to respond to as they felt comfortable.

Prompts were provided where necessary and responses were recorded in a confidential manner ensuring stories that were shared did not contain any identifying factors by those who shared them or who they pertained to.

The three major questions asked were as follows:

- 1. What does a safe and well community mean to you?**
- 2. What are the safety and well-being issues facing Niagara?**
- 3. What are we (Niagara Region) doing well and what opportunities do we have to improve?**

Participants were seen building off of one another’s responses and became more and more comfortable sharing their experiences as the session moved on. At the end of the session, the Elder then provided the closing and the session ended. All participants have been mailed a craft kit (includes a pouch, bracelet or earrings) as a thank you for their time and participation.

This report will contain the main findings of the sessions and detailed feedback will be available at the bottom of this document (see [Appendix 1](#)).

### **Context:**

As we look back, in 2020 the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) signed an MOU with municipalities of Ontario in order to “work together to improve the lives of Indigenous people in each municipality.” According to the OFIFC President, Jennifer Dockstader, this is meant to “[recognize] the mutual responsibility to address urban Indigenous community needs, through relationships, partnerships and collaboration.” We concur and note, it is important to start the work on these goals immediately, as 85% of Indigenous people now live in urban and rural areas off-reserve.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that these proceedings occurred during the time of a global pandemic. A couple of challenges with these engagement sessions was getting individuals to sign up, and then to get everyone who signed up to attend the session as sometimes we would not hear anything back once they registered. Other than that, there were a couple of delays getting the sessions started due to minor technical issues.

The sessions received positive feedback from those who attended and definitely made individuals feel that their voice was being heard and that they have a chance to have their concerns addressed directly. Many enjoyed the delivery of a virtual engagement session and the thank-you gift seemed to be a positive touch enjoyed by all.

## Summary:

Major findings (5) for each question are as follows:

1. What does a safe and well community mean to you?
  - a. Being taken seriously and treated with sincerity when accessing public health and safety resources such as calling 911, accessing healthcare, fire services, etc.;
  - b. Not experiencing a lack of resources due to unaffordability of basic needs such as adequate food and housing;
  - c. Having a safe place to celebrate our Indigenous identity and seek Indigenous-specific resources and help;
  - d. Being able to walk outdoors safely and have an overall safe outdoor environment or neighborhood;
  - e. Being connected, especially during the pandemic with higher rates of social isolation.
  
2. What are the safety and well-being issues facing Niagara?
  - a. Poor responses from police, healthcare, and figures of authority when seeking help due to unresolved systemic racism;
  - b. Gangs, drugs, addiction, violence, domestic violence, human trafficking and homelessness;
  - c. Lack of safe spaces to express our identity and access culturally sensitive resources;
  - d. Lack of sovereignty and collaboration/awareness with those in positions of power in order to address Indigenous needs using a realistic approach or culturally sensitive lens;
  - e. Poor infrastructure – need more bike lanes, sidewalks, streetlights, bus shelters, public transportation and routes, affordable housing.
  
3. What are we (Niagara Region) doing well and what opportunities do we have to improve?
  - a. **Strengths:** Indigenous organizations in the region are doing a great job providing effective resources and programs and keeping everyone connected, especially in the time of the pandemic.
  - b. **Opportunities:** Refer to and invest in Indigenous organizations by providing them with the resources and opportunities to address issues rather than trying to take over or duplicate their services; housing waitlists are too long for a decent, affordable place; more youth-focused opportunities and activities; requiring mental health training and cultural sensitivity training to police officers, healthcare workers, etc. to decolonize inherent biases; more Indigenous representation in program and services – need Indigenous advocacy as well as the numbers to begin authentic collaboration and representation.

## **Recommendations and Action: (what action items do we want to come out of this?)**

Overall, there was a clear need for these individuals to have their voices heard and these engagement sessions were a good way to provide that opportunity. Responses were detailed and many had stories that were relatable to all participants, which shows there are common, community-wide issues we are addressing.

N.I.C.E. continues its record of working in unity, together and engaging the Indigenous community. We are thankful to all of our participants and organizers for their help in such a critical matter involving the safety and well-being of our community and we can't wait to see what positive changes the CSWB sessions and findings will create with our future collaboration.

Our Indigenous people will in no way trust nor support the Region of Niagara without authentic relationship building which includes our leadership and our people, therefore this is our first recommendation:

- 1. We recommend a permanent joint Roundtable be established quickly, comprised of N.I.C.E. and Regional Councillors with the view to initiating and establishing sustainable relationships and to plan for the first Indigenous Region of Niagara Joint Leadership Summit.**

First steps include the Indigenous Cultural Awareness and Safety issues that need to be addressed in order to even have the conversations. We commend the Region in partnership with Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre for the joint work done so far. The current video sessions, were a starting place however continuity must include the historical perspectives, all facets, all agencies and all Nations relevant to the region.

The timing, needs to come soon after these consultations so the Indigenous community members will see and understand there is action taking place. Therefore, we recommend, this commence in the fall of 2021 and definitely prior to December 31, 2021. It is vital for the Region to ensure **all** Indigenous agencies are at the table so the Indigenous community members view this as a collective and not a siloed, or privileged approach. This must be made known through a public statement from the Chair.

The Roundtable will be able in perpetuity to be proactive and not reactive. This will aid in building sustainable relationships of goodwill for future leaders to follow. They will not have to be doing this work over again, and not have to suddenly pivot to address issues that have been ignored. For instance, when the opportunity comes round again to bid on a national event: i.e., 2021 Canada Summer Games; they will already have jointly planned and ascertained more that adequate funds needed by both the Indigenous community and the region to fully, equitably and happily participate.

This Roundtable can build on some of the good work already in place and strengthen it while beginning to look at other areas. Areas like the Children's Services have had some excellent success stories of working and collaborations over some generations now. First with Niagara Chapter Native Women Inc.'s Learners Academy Day Care in the 1990s right until today with "Wakonioten" Child Care Centre, and Family Resource Centre (now Early Learning Center).

Additionally, building on the relationship with Housing Dept. For some generations again, the Municipality has interacted with both Ganawageh Urban Native Housing (1984) Oonuhseh Native Housing (1988) with new developments in the works, this is yet another area to continue building relationship and one again that is mentioned heavily in the report. The annual funding to Abbey House (Indigenous Women's Transitional Housing) is a commitment that is far over due and ought to not even be a question.

These already existing relationships can be strengthened and used also as markers for the region to gauge itself by. Renewed relationships recently emerging such as with Public Health are promising. Public Health may have the mandate to work much more closely with younger families as they begin their journey of having children-the strengthening of prenatal practices in a manner safe and acceptable to Indigenous women will ensure more Indigenous families stay intact and avoid child welfare issues upon giving birth for example. Public Health can work to ensure food security for example as this is another need expressed by participants, Public Health can be working more closely with all Indigenous organizations on multiple levels, especially during this opioid crisis, with youth and those in harm reduction situations.

We see that there are multiple opportunities now for the Region to broaden its intention by making it known within its ranks, just what its intention and commitment is the Indigenous people of this region. The Region has to be seen as safe by Indigenous people to work with though, whether Seniors Dept. or Planning or Parking By law.

**2. We recommend that the Region of Niagara make a public formal statement on its intention to address systemic racism within all its systems as it pertains to Indigenous people, based on the findings in this report.**

We heard very clearly about the discrimination experienced by our community members, either through housing, justice, law enforcement, health care, infant care, child welfare, commercial establishments, businesses or education systems. Many of these are regulated, licensed or overseen via by-law by the Region of Niagara. Further, that the Region of Niagara commit to undertaking an internal review of all its policies and procedures, regulations and by-laws through an Indigenous equity lens to adjust and enhance to ensure safety, equity and access

to opportunity for Indigenous people. This would include but not be limited to such areas as procurement policies for example so there is fair and equitable access for Indigenous businesses and vendors. Also, HR and hiring policies-are the positions ever posted to Indigenous Job boards, are the interview questions and hiring practices inclusive of Indigenous perspectives, knowledge or input so related questions can ensure racists are not hired? Is there a public facing statement in the hiring process on what the stance of the Region of Niagara is on the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous people in its region?

**3. We recommend a joint summit of all of the Indigenous agencies' Board of Directors and the leadership of the Niagara Region to convene a minimum of once or twice annually to start.**

The Summit will send a strong signal to *all residents* of Niagara that the Indigenous people are not just here, but that Indigenous people are important members of this community. Through the Summit, truth telling must begin in order to create a new, effective and realistic response. Now that you understand the background and context of these sessions, as well as their outcomes, our sincere hope is that you will have the moral fortitude to exercise the political will required to collaborate with our leadership in order to honestly improve the lives of the Indigenous families of the Niagara Region. Together we can tackle several goals at a time. Let the journey begin.

## Appendix 1:

Be advised, some of these responses are quotes and may be jarring to read, nevertheless, need to be said. No names will be revealed by NCNW regarding any of these responses to maintain full confidentiality.

### 1. What does a safe and well community mean to you?

- Has lots of green space
- Access to healthy food & drinking water
- Store clerks accept status card with no questions, judgement or ugly faces
- All services are trauma-informed and know about intergenerational issues that affect our people i.e. policing, fire dept., EMS, mental health, justice, education and hospital services
- Urban planning is reflective of night lighting needs for safety
- Police and neighbourhood watch are patrolling in a friendly way and take reports seriously
- “Where I am not scared to ask someone for help”
- Parks and sidewalks are safe, no drug paraphernalia around
- Sex workers rights are protected
- “Where I can safely raise my children without fear”
- Continuity of care, not just for a few
- Access to safe and affordable housing
- “Safe and affordable public transportation for me and my kids”
- Meaningful services without judgement, when and where you need them
- People have healthy and trusting relationships
- No judgement or racism for being Indigenous
- Everyone has access to resources they need including jobs
- Low crime, neighbours/community watches out for each other (requires communication)
- Walk outside without fear, eliminate systemic racism, access to basic necessities, medicine wheel (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health), those between 18-30 years old especially require safe spaces
- Having equality, filling in gaps and barriers in Indigenous community, limited shelter/safe beds/safe homes for women and families, lack of access to healing lodges
- Media could highlight more of the positives than negatives so we can get back to community well-being focus rather than instilling fear, have more platforms for services and supports, some people may not have resources during lockdown and we are not seeing that
- Important to include section about what communities will do during future community-wide crises (such as pandemic), maybe community helpers go and knock on doors because some might not have phones or be connected with an agency
- Check on your neighbours
- It’s more effective for other organizations to provide Indigenous organizations money than to try to copy or replace their programs and services
- Need money to be safe (for rent, cost of living, food, etc.), there’s a stigma around getting help which prevents people from wanting to access help, therefore there is a need to make sure everyone is safe and well despite how much money they make
- Social media can be a dangerous/toxic community too and should be regulated
- People cannot use 211 (no one’s picking up) and it’s disappointing that it’s unavailable, there are too many numbers to call which can be confusing

- There is a lack of a sense of safety in one's own home due to higher levels of thefts and break-ins due to the increased opioids issue
- Kids aren't always safe outside and they need to be kept tabs on, kids are going missing
- People are being robbed for clothing or money; it should be like it used to
- Where and how can I access the resources I need in case of an emergency (ex. A woman was released from jail in SK at night and she was found dead in the cold the next day)
- There are deaths from loneliness and sadness (we can't have visitors or go out during the pandemic, some don't have internet access, etc.) - we want more friendliness between neighbours and especially for seniors
- Even attending church or medical appointments is a challenge (over the phone or virtually but some may not have the resources or skills to do it this way)
- To go into public places without being judged (it happens too often when shopping and using a status card) - it feels like it happens in places closer to reserves or that people are less accepting in smaller areas
- We are taught not to call the police due to dire consequences of doing so
- We face different reactions due to our accent if we are immigrants or have language barriers, etc.
- Everyone should have the resources they need regardless of their journey (i.e. active drug use and not ready to be sober yet, active sex work, etc.) and ensuring they have a safe space
- Using a trauma-informed lens, no judgement (such as for those who use cannabis)
- Knowledge of intergenerational trauma
- Healthy community
- Urban planning, moving away from places to get needs met (groceries, etc.), remoteness of community is an issue (maybe need to make micro-communities)
- Reliable transportation is an issue, sidewalks
- COVID-19 has been pushing issues to the surface
- Post-secondary students in Niagara region (Brock & NC) need neighbourhoods
- Infrastructure for community self-sufficiency (i.e., community gardens) to gather and feed people, help them build relationships with other community members
- Hiring more individuals to carry the Indigenous community (show investment and commitment, and accurate representation with higher numbers)
- Require education and outreach in being visible, sharing power and resources
- Have your voice heard, be valid, knowing where to go (who to speak to)
- Sometimes it's not safe to complain at the hospital itself where the issue occurred
- Follow-up complaints on an individual basis
- Knowing our community is connected (through programs, services, elders, workers, etc.)
- Breaking cycles of trauma before they become a crisis
- Being able to walk down the street safely (having plenty of street lights at night)
- Feeling welcome at mainstream services (maybe having a 'safe place' identification on the door)
- The stigma/stereotyping against having a status card
- Typically people say no crime, robberies, homelessness, but our safety issues are different (i.e. comparing potholes against racism)
- Our people (having a shared understanding with one another, a safe space to converse and share our culture)
- Having a sense of belonging, being understood
- Common beliefs, standards, and understandings

- A safe community means having safe parks and sidewalks, community support, less drug paraphernalia on the streets
- When a community can come together and reach out anytime someone needs help, not being scared to ask or feel judged
- The ability to have connections, resources, and contacts
- That all people can live securely in their neighbourhood knowing that police and other neighbourhood watch programs are patrolling and taking reports seriously
- A community working together to address issues together (interagency), continuity of care, connection for all and not just a few, to have access to meaningful services without judgement when you need it, access to safe and affordable housing, local food sustainability
- Being able to walk around your community and feel safe from predators and discrimination
- A place where I can feel comfortable being Indigenous and expressing myself and my identity; where I can safely raise my child

## 2. What are the safety and well-being issues facing Niagara?

- Systemic racism, costs of living (food personal products), price gouging, housing and associated costs, transportation (many unlicensed drivers or those accepting unknown rideshares), gangs, drugs (people know who sellers are but won't tell someone)
- Need to make Crime Stoppers etc. more accessible (Indigenous people don't like the police)
- Police presence can lead to racism and stereotyping which can be dangerous
- Human trafficking (people don't want to be indoors and can end up like this)
- Indigenous people are thought of as disposable (if the government cannot eliminate them, they abuse them), therefore they are more at risk in Niagara
- Drug addictions, inability to open up to neighbours and friends, families, etc. to seek help (how do we reach those people)
- City communities have stayed away from communal living such as in rural areas (lack of familiarity within those cities)
- Public transpiration is inadequate, not enough bus shelters, some bus shelters are really dirty
- Too much police presence is intimidating, not enough cultural awareness, look down on you
- Human trafficking is high
- Street lighting is poor
- There are no bike lanes on the streets at least not in every city
- Lots of street drugs in high schools
- Not enough safe affordable housing
- Gun violence, opioid addictions
- "Women and girls do not feel safe at all walking alone down a street even in daylight"
- "Need more safe injection sites to cut down on overdosing"
- Urgent care, emergency rooms and mental health is not handled well, too many suicides off the bridges, being in emergency department – "what is not happening at emergency department?"
- Our people don't want to go to hospitals due to bad treatment
- Hospitals are not a safe place for pregnant Indigenous women as infant will be taken by Children's Aid

- Sexual assaults and aggression towards women-police don't do anything
- Few if any safe spaces on campus for GLT2SQ youth
- Police think we are lazy drunks
- Not enough affordable healthy food
- Employers think we are not job ready, therefore unemployable
- Civic leaders need an informed lens to change things- they need education
- Middle management in many civic services are poorly educated about Indigenous people, our rights and their own responsibilities
- "Slum landlords, if you complain they kick you out"
- Nowhere safe to live
- Most housing that is decent is not accessible
- Living wages – employers won't pay a living wage
- Childcare is a barrier for when I want to work but can't
- Patients aren't receiving the proper care when it comes to mental health aid, medical treatment
- The well-being of many people in Niagara depends on income tax while landlords are asking to renew paperwork and there are no clinics open to support low-income families/individuals, most cannot afford to pay an accountant and were using the local library's clinic/services which are now closed
- There are gangs in and around the Niagara region
- Everyone must do their due diligence; we should be able to go out without needing backup/extra safety
- We are asked questions related to drugs and alcohol, don't get to see a doctor in a timely manner in hospitals, we always have our guard up in those situations (some learn to speak up for themselves but not everyone does)
- We need education so that misconceptions can be stopped (such as why we are tax exempt, etc.)
- We need protection from bad policing and healthcare
- Police need to understand the history, there is a long-term change needed
- When a situation happens once, you never forget it
- Victims of sexual assault are not safe (when the court withdraws the charges the perpetrators are on the streets without punishment and can go after these women again as they know where they live, etc. and if these women move, they lose their residency)
- The issues against children are paramount
- Leadership (need parties to come together at the table instead of maintaining gaps between each other)
- Leadership is mainly middle management that is missing sensitivity and knowledge
- Leadership has lack of informed lens or are unaware of their own traumas and therefore act in a colonized manner
- Housing requires status card now (we don't feel safe/have a safe place to live, many from the 60s scoop and residential schools are also unable to get a status card now)
- Requiring a status card or self-identification ("filling a box")
- It's hard not to get divided/siloed between ourselves as well due to 'identification' problems created by colonizers and through education systems
- Addictions and mental health
- Investing in decriminalizing for users and addicts
- Safe supply and safe injection sites for users (to have the opportunity to function and be contributing members of society)

- To create safe spaces so people can create their own safety plan and follow it through
- Identifying vulnerable groups and providing informational resources (LGBTQ+, single mothers, Indigenous people)
- Smoother process and follow-up which requires better resource management and sharing, need othersto delegate tasks to Indigenous organizations
- Recognize and acknowledge sovereignty (legislation needs to be changed)
- Safe space to express Indigenous identity and everywhere we go
- Human trafficking, homelessness, addicts
- Awareness
- Our clients like to be able to depend on us
- In the medical field accusations are being made, no support for moms, discriminatory remarks, it's unfair, lack of work ethics (training doesn't always eliminate personal beliefs or biases)
- Non-police advocacy support (non brutal force)
- Address the mindset of the officers
- Violence and racism (which can be found in any community)
- No bike lanes, missing sidewalks, poor public transportation
- Opioid addictions, domestic violence, no tangible or meaningful mental health services, lack ofservices for disabled children and adults, lack of safe, affordable housing
- No mental health doctors, not enough addiction awareness
- Cannot currently have face-to-face, in-person connections that are necessary for our senses
- Drug use, gun violence, women and girls not feeling safe to walk alone anywhere at any time of the day
- Systemic racism
  - Indigenous people are thought of as disposable, which makes people feel less safe andmore at-risk
  - Indigenous identity is not just about dancing and performing
  - "We don't see ourselves in education, policing, etc. Given these complexities, we need education, outreach and commitment"
    - E.g. batch hiring instead of 1-2 people to carry a whole institution or organization
- Poverty / wages not keeping up with the high cost of living, "even people with job security are struggling"
- Transportation
- Homelessness
  - 27% of homeless people identified as Indigenous
  - Requires a focus on the men
- Gangs
- Addictions (fentanyl and opioids)
  - Drug use – creates unsafe environments
  - Investing in decriminalization models that move away from policing and focus on well-being
  - Safe supply, consumption and treatment sites provide an opportunity to be a contributing member of society
- Human trafficking
  - Used to gain housing and survival
  - Niagara is one of the top locations for human trafficking

- Domestic violence
  - There is shame and fear around reaching out to neighbour – this is detachment from community
  - Creates additional isolation
- Community belonging
  - Lack of sense of belonging / security
  - “You don’t know who you’re stopping for or who’s stopping for you”
- Political changes are required to ensure Indigenous people feel safe
  - Recognize and acknowledge sovereignty
  - Intersectionality

### **3. What are we (Niagara Region) doing well and what opportunities do we have to improve?**

- Health bus outreach is good – expanding it to include more and mental health too
- Stop soloing services
- “Listen to and partner more with Indigenous organizations, they are doing a really good job”
- Human trafficking issue – make it more broadly known, so it can be stopped
- “Indigenous people feel safest going to Indigenous programs and services”
- Work to break down stereotyping of us
- “Native housing has been constrained too long”, they need influx of resources to expand their capacity
- All Indigenous services are doing exceptional job with the little resources they have, they all need more resources to build capacity
- Affordable geared to income wait lists are far too long of wait lists - decades!
- “Hire us, we want to work”
- Employment increases wealth and stops reliance on food banks, or underground jobs, etc.
- Naloxone program training – make more accessible in high schools to students
- Refer to our Indigenous agencies
- Give real back up support when we ask for help
- Domestic violence – “our voice is relevant and needs to be trusted”
- Our youth need safe spaces that are identified as safe LGT2SQ
- More education is needed about Indigenous people in general
- Need more youth groups that are not attached to employment and training
- Niagara Regional Police (NRP) has to improve its treatment and follow up with DV and our women – (one “treated like shit”, she said, as if she did “something wrong”, “NRP stood up for the guy that bashed me around”).
- Find and rebuild safe affordable housing, brown fielding could be happening at a steady pace, there is enough empty stock in every city to end this problem
- An NRP officer told one Indigenous person they rounded up, “they were going to take them out of the city” – we all know what that means; another story about the suicide bridge, “NRP picked up an Indigenous girl, went down under the bridge, beat and raped her before dropping her off in Centennial Park”
- Stop the racism
- Invest in our Indigenous agencies
- Get the opioids off the streets, and the people making and selling these drugs
- Follow the opioid money trail to see who is really benefiting from this crisis
- Review and change your policies in all departments

- NCNW, Friendship Centres have gone above and beyond (wellness checks, wellness bags, foodsecurity, etc.)
- Metis Nation (virtual workshops with home delivery)
- Indigenous Diabetes Health Circle (keeping people connected)
- Public Health Outreach Workers have not been available and shut down due to pandemic (sexual health is at risk and there is a substance abuse harm reduction need)
- Outreach work such as mobile pieces, wrapping services around where people are located instead of being siloed or only existing in a pinpoint location
- Indigenous community liaisons to build meaningful relationships
- Police and Family and Children's Services (FACS) show up together and young children are trained to then not call the police
- Lots of great programs (Positive Living Niagara, 'kids' outreach, etc.)
- Huge housing waitlists everywhere
- Coming into the community (such as NCNW who see what the community needs are and respond to those – i.e. daycare in the past, FACS facilitation, etc.)
- Doing police/background checks when employing new employees especially when working with vulnerable communities/clients
- Having community supports (if one service/program doesn't work, have them recommend another)
- Community check-ins, circles, crafting at home
- Make us feel like we matter, that our voice is relevant
- Have programs for the youth where they have a voice
- Having access to laptops, transportation, food cards
- Volunteer appreciation is needed
- Need to learn life skills and transferable skills and feel empowered
- Learn our role and responsibility (tell them who they are and where they come from) to inspire them
- Having resources for youth/students (physical books, mailed bundles, crafts, medicine bags, etc.)
- Bringing each other around with food (nutrition and gathering)
- Pushing unused budgets into youth and community
- We're taking care of ourselves so no one has to take care of us/we don't have to rely on someone else
- Need improvement in shelter and programs for men too
- Get to trauma source instead of just effects
- Improvements for LGBTQ+ and two-spirited individuals, having people/resources to connect them with
- Awareness
- Our clients like to be able to depend on us
- In the medical field accusations are being made, no support for moms, discriminatory remarks, it's unfair, lack of work ethics (training doesn't always eliminate personal beliefs or biases)
- Non-police advocacy support (non brutal force)
- Address the mindset of the officers
- Approaches must be tailored directly to the community (needs are different everywhere)
- Some schools have safe spaces (must identify who and what they're for)
- Safety isn't just about not harming

- Somewhere without the identity stigma
- Art on the wall, burning sage (which is more difficult to do virtually but places such as IDHC try), physical places for safety
- Important for others to do their own research and pay Indigenous employees to do the traumawork
- Need to match needs and do more to help Indigenous people feel safe and that they have the resources they need
- Outreach needs to reach community and region is doing it well but isn't investing or growing that
- Thankful for three fires
- Barriers and issues: NRPs treating females in domestic violence cases poorly when all they want is help and they aren't getting it
- Not having appropriate representation
- "Makes me feel like I have to take the law into my own hands"
- Too many steps/waiting too much time to have action taken
- Lack of historical education/ training (i.e., residential schools)
- Lack of visible minorities (only 3 in 700+ police)
- Black cop says he's too black for the blue and too blue for the black (doesn't feel like he fits in anywhere)
- Minorities in policing don't get the same promotions/opportunities
- Shooting as first act instead of prevention and protection
- Police need to be kept accountable (say inappropriate things, cursing their badge, also and the Green Bridge)
- Funding based on quality of service instead of quantity of service, some of the programs like housing have problems working with some more complex cases like severe schizophrenia and trauma; "I have heard from workers that this is because of the fear of not making their numbers by year end"

## **STRENGTHS**

- Ensuring parents feel comfortable going to program coordinators for advice and support
- Various programs offered are exceptional
- Virtual contact opportunities which are better than no contact at all, social media posts are a good way to keep up to date and engaged nowadays
- Direct public health activities, children's programming and seniors' programming

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Need better trash pickup, more youth activities; significant capacity building to connect with more community members, budget constraints mean programs are to capacity and waitlists become problematic, need to focus on youth groups that are not necessarily attached to employment and training, more affordable and safe housing as waitlists can become decades long; more programs for all ages
- Finding/building or repurposing for safe, affordable housing and no effective anti-racism programs and/or campaigns for all age groups, need to be more serious about the opioid crisis (work with other organizations and get it off the streets and the people making/selling it)
- Police require mental health and training and cultural sensitivity training (has to be ongoing and mandatory, auxiliary task force with Indigenous members)
- Must rebuild relationships with the community (strong, inherent biases that need to be

decolonized)

## Footnotes

1. **Great Trail of Trauma:** Initial use of and reference in this report by the author, Wendy Sturgeon. Concept origins in dialogue with family members, elders, youth. Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons and through years of gathered stories and experiences. In reference to the longstanding hundreds of years, of trauma put upon the Indigenous people from first contact to present moment.
2. **Stakeholder.** [“Words are important: they can wound or they can heal”](https://www.rmdelaney.com/blog/da-news/words-are-important-they-can-wound-or-they-can-heal/) March 15, 2021 Delaney, the Engagement People Blog. <https://www.rmdelaney.com/blog/da-news/words-are-important-they-can-wound-or-they-can-heal/>.

“As a group, lets work towards reconciliation.

Here is a small example of how we can do that from an engagement perspective. The word “stakeholder” is typically used in engagement to communicate that an individual, group or organization will be impacted (positively or negatively) by a pending decision. This means they hold a stake in the outcome of the decision; hence they are a “stakeholder”. This word has different meanings to different people.

Its origins date back to the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century when several European nations set out to colonize the “new world”. During the colonization of the lands, we now refer to as Canada and occupied mostly by settlers, the colonial powers in Britain and France were seeking to extract resources and eliminate the sovereign people of this land. The purpose was to establish a means of trade between themselves and the rest of the world. Despite the sovereign governments of Indigenous Peoples, colonial governments of the day set up land registry offices to encourage resource extraction on lands occupied and governed by Indigenous Peoples.

Settlers were encouraged to extract timber, minerals, water and fur and to establish farms by marking out the territory they intended to occupy, with a series of stakes. They located these stakes on a map and then took the map to the land registry office to register their claim. That claim – referred to as a “stake” – once approved by the colonial government, gave settlers exclusive use to the lands. This process of taking something without permission or compensation would otherwise be referred to as theft – the politically correct language is “colonialism”. Has an official ring to it I suppose. At the end of the day, however, it was the theft of lands and resources that had sustained Indigenous Peoples for millennia. To add insult to injury, Indigenous Peoples were excluded from the benefits of these developments and thousands were killed defending their ancestral homelands.”

3. **R.C.A.P. ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, 1991-1996.** Nationwide look at how to improve relationships; 440 Recommendations.