



# The Urban Indigenous ACTION PLAN



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## MINISTER'S AND PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

In Ontario, 85.5 per cent of First Nation, Métis and Inuit people live in urban or rural areas. When Indigenous communities and service providers have access to the resources to provide culturally appropriate services that capitalize on the strengths of culture and diversity, community gatherings, safe spaces and meaningful engagement in planning, policy and program development, the result is positive outcomes for Indigenous peoples in urban and rural areas. However, many still face considerable barriers to opportunities or supports available in large and small urban and rural areas, such as education, employment, social services and housing.

To address this, provincial Indigenous organizations came together with the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to co-design and co-develop this Urban Indigenous Action Plan. The process was informed by the voices of urban Indigenous communities and service providers across the province. Input was also sought from non-Indigenous organizations, as well as the private sector. These efforts have created a plan that is as inclusive and

informed as possible and facilitates a better understanding of how we can work together on achieving shared outcomes.

The common theme heard was the importance of relationships and partnerships between urban Indigenous organizations and all parts and levels of government. This plan sets out principles and steps to build these relationships and to engage Indigenous governments, organizations and communities in the planning, design and evaluation of programs and services, based on wise practices of urban Indigenous governments, organizations and communities.

People, communities, service providers and governments in urban and rural centres across the province must work together to ensure the social environment in which we live, work and seek to thrive is safe and accessible for all. This requires wholistic, culture-based and prevention-focused approaches responding to the unique needs and priorities of urban Indigenous communities, best identified and led by Indigenous communities and organizations.

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Provincial Indigenous organizations came together with the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to co-design and co-develop this Urban Indigenous Action Plan. The process was informed by the voices of urban Indigenous communities and service providers across the province.

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This recognizes that different communities have their own approaches and may have their own network and coalition of voices that can and should be engaged.

This plan is a tool for all provincial ministries so that the policies and programs they develop better respond to the unique needs and priorities of urban and rural Indigenous communities and the organizations that serve them; and, that the work we do is directly shaped by First Nations, Métis and Inuit voices living in urban and rural areas.

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan is another step in our shared reconciliation journey between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across this province. We encourage all organizations and institutions to use this document as a tool to guide their work as a means to better services and better outcomes for Indigenous people in their communities.

***We can all be  
proud of this plan.***





# READING NOTES

## The Urban Indigenous Action Plan

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan (the plan) is a policy framework that was co-developed by the government of Ontario (Ontario), the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC), the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), and the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA). The plan is a guidance document to assist Ontario in its approach to developing policies, programs and practices for urban Indigenous issues and needs in this province. The plan does not create any legally binding standards or obligations with respect to resources or funding. The actions set forth in this document will require flexibility in their application and will depend upon the context in which particular policies, programs and practices are developed and implemented.

## Urban Indigenous

For the Urban Indigenous Action Plan, the term "urban Indigenous" refers to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people living in cities, towns and rural areas in Ontario, and recognizes the diversity between and within Indigenous communities. For ease of terminology, "Indigenous" will be used to collectively refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

## Urban Indigenous Communities

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan is predicated on the principle of supporting reconciliation with urban Indigenous communities and, as such, must be adopted and implemented in a manner that respects and recognizes the various urban Indigenous agencies, communities and governance structures that exist within Ontario.

## About the Métis Nation of Ontario

In December 2017, the Métis Nation of Ontario, the government of Canada and the government of Ontario signed a historic Framework Agreement to Advance Reconciliation, which includes developing a government to government relationship. The MNO has been delivering province-wide programs and services over the course of the last 25 years and participated in the UIAP in order to continue to support positive outcomes for Métis families and communities living in urban centres across Ontario. MNO has established processes for engaging with its communities and will seek to engage with ministries and other partners to implement the Urban Indigenous Action Plan.



# OVERVIEW

## THE URBAN INDIGENOUS ACTION PLAN

**The Urban Indigenous Action Plan supports reconciliation between urban Indigenous communities, the provincial government and the broader public service by:**

- Recognizing relationships and culture as the foundational requirements for policy and program development; and,
- Guiding government and the broader public service to develop responsive, inclusive policies, programs and evaluations with, and that meet the needs of, urban Indigenous communities.

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan was collaboratively developed by the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR), the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC), the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), with input from urban Indigenous communities across Ontario. Community engagements were held across

the province to identify priorities, strengths and challenges faced by urban Indigenous communities and service providers and to inform the development of the plan. The Urban Indigenous Action Plan responds to the history and diversity of urban Indigenous communities in Ontario and seeks to be informed by the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and the Report and Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan works to achieve improved community outcomes based on the ongoing and future work of provincial strategies, with a continued focus on addressing the TRC's Calls to Action. It is anticipated that the implementation of the proposed action areas will support areas highlighted by the TRC, including reconciliation, education, the child welfare system, health and healthcare, involvement in the justice system and overall wellbeing.



# POLICY SUMMARY: THE URBAN INDIGENOUS ACTION PLAN



## VISION

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan envisions respectful relationships with Indigenous people as the foundation of all policy, programming and interactions between the province of Ontario and urban Indigenous organizations and communities.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES





## ACTION AREAS

ACTION AREAS	DESIRED OUTCOME	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR
<b>1. Relationship Building</b>	Relationships between governments and urban Indigenous communities, organizations and service providers are respectful, transparent, responsive and accountable.	Ministries demonstrate uptake of culturally relevant action and community priorities, as well as work with urban Indigenous organizations to ensure local / regional relationships are meaningful to urban Indigenous communities.
<b>2. Policy Engagement and Co-Development</b>	Policy development processes incorporate, reflect and respect the voices and diversities of urban Indigenous communities.	Ministries develop and implement policy that incorporates urban Indigenous community-led processes, expertise, knowledge and priorities.
<b>3. Service Planning, Design and Delivery</b>	<p>Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, service providers and governments are partners in provincial, regional and local policy and program design and delivery, to respond to current and future needs of communities.</p> <p>Programs and services are accessible, person-centred, culturally rooted and delivered in safe, culturally sensitive environments. Particular attention is given to diversity within urban Indigenous communities, including the needs of Indigenous women, youth, families, seniors, people with disabilities and LGBTQ2S.</p>	<p>Ministries demonstrate cross-government alignment of culturally appropriate planning and implementation of initiatives for urban Indigenous communities that integrate urban Indigenous priorities and approaches.</p> <p>Provincial, local and regional initiatives are addressing barriers to accessing services experienced by urban Indigenous communities.</p>
<b>4. Evaluation</b>	Data, analysis and evaluation informs the continuous improvement of policies and programs that impact urban Indigenous communities.	<p>Ministries incorporate data collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination processes that are safe, useful and relevant for urban Indigenous communities.</p> <p>Data, analysis and evaluation results reflect urban Indigenous community perspectives and priorities and inform ministries' policy engagement and development initiatives.</p>





# INTRODUCTION

## History, Culture and Diversity


Indigenous peoples in Ontario and across Canada have distinct connections to the natural environment; a relationship to land, water, plants and animals that has been built over thousands of years. Before Ontario's towns and cities emerged, and still to this day, Indigenous people and communities maintain ways of being and knowing that seek to uphold the health and sustainability of all things in the environment. These distinct connections to the natural environment form Indigenous cultural understanding and ways of being.

In this context, culture remains the heart of healthy ways of being for Indigenous communities – an important truth that must be understood by Ontario's public service and anyone serving Indigenous communities. As such, any approach to policy and programming in Ontario must consider the wide diversity of Indigenous peoples, including: Mushkegowuk (Cree); Oji-Cree; Mohawk, Tuscarora, Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida and Onondaga

(the Haudenosaunee - Onkwehonwe Peoples); Delaware; Mississauga; Chippewa; Pottawotami; Algonquin, Odawa (Anishinaabe); Lenape; Métis; and Inuit across the province, reflected in differing cultural traditions, ways of knowing, languages and conceptions of wellbeing. The urban Indigenous population in Ontario today also includes a wide diversity of cultures and peoples from across the country.

Regional diversity also shapes the needs and priorities of urban Indigenous communities – communities in northern, southern, eastern and western towns and cities have different needs that must be carefully considered during policy-making processes. Traditional land/territories transcend municipal or provincial boundaries, and Indigenous peoples historically and to this day continue to migrate within the province, and between provinces and territories, in pursuit of culture, opportunity and wellbeing. Diversity within Indigenous communities contributes to the dynamic differences that characterize Indigenous populations in Ontario's cities and towns.





Colonialism has had many significant disruptive and destructive impacts on the wellbeing of Indigenous communities and has perpetuated underlying racist attitudes and stereotypes, many of which continue today. The removal of Indigenous children from their communities, through the residential schools or the sixties scoop, are only some examples of systemic, intergenerational injustice inflicted by Canada's colonial legacy and which shapes the current environment in which Indigenous peoples seek to achieve greater self-determination.

Today's policy leaders in and outside of government must realize that the legacy of colonialism continues to reverberate throughout public policy and programming, extending a legacy that works to impede reconciliation. As such, all Ontarians are tasked with breathing life into reconciliation, particularly by prioritizing respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples led through example by the province.

## Policy Landscape

In May 2014, Ontario announced a commitment to develop an action plan to address the unique needs, strengths and priorities of Indigenous people living in urban settings and the urban community-based organizations that serve them. The plan is intended to be an overarching framework that guides approaches, policies and actions in the province of Ontario, formalizing the current engagement and co-development processes underway.

For decades, urban Indigenous communities have been creating local solutions, integrating service delivery using hub models, building local and regional

relationships and focusing on providing client-centred, culture-based services. Local gatherings, engagement in planning, policy and program development, and the creation of safe spaces are among the most impactful activities that demonstrate the strength inherent in communities.

The TRC's Report and Calls to Action set a clear direction for governments to close the gaps in outcomes for Indigenous people and recognizes the role of Indigenous organizations and communities in effecting positive change.

Some early examples of co-development processes, and increased levels of Indigenous partner participation in the development of province-wide initiatives include: *Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women*; the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy; as well as the collaborative work on approaches to Indigenous housing. These initiatives are setting the path for meaningful change in the province. Indigenous communities are also being engaged in the design, development and delivery of initiatives under *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*.

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan acknowledges that Ontario cannot drive this process alone or in isolation from the diverse and numerous other systems, agencies, and institutions, as well as other levels of government, involved in the service delivery landscape. Innovative approaches and practices for Indigenous-led policy, program and service design and delivery already take place at the provincial and local levels.

It is also recognized that approaches, including those characterized as co-development initiatives, may be inconsistent or underutilized. The Urban Indigenous Action Plan therefore seeks to support and provide guidance for more consistent approaches across government to include Indigenous partners in an effective and meaningful way. This approach will better address the needs and priorities of urban Indigenous people, communities and the organizations that serve them.

Ongoing transformational work and many years of meaningful action and change are ahead. The Urban Indigenous Action Plan will ensure that Ontario and its service delivery partners continue to move in this direction, and measure progress along the way.

## Responding to Community Feedback

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan was developed to respond to what was heard during engagements with urban Indigenous communities and service providers, and informs further priority-setting for action. The OFIFC, MNO and ONWA facilitated community engagement sessions across Ontario between 2015 and 2017, as well as the Provincial Urban Aboriginal Forum in March 2016, to gather information for the development of the Urban Indigenous Action Plan. The 2015 community sessions focused on identifying strengths and challenges faced by Indigenous communities and service providers to inform the development of the UIAP Discussion Paper. The discussion paper provided the basis for the community engagements in 2016-2017, which then informed the development of the Urban Indigenous Action Plan.



The first round of engagements underscored and identified some of the priority issues affecting urban Indigenous people in Ontario, as well as the importance of ensuring particular focus is paid to Indigenous youth, seniors, women, families, LGBTQ2S and people with disabilities, including:

- Experiences of racism resulting from lack of cultural competency in service delivery;
- Homelessness and lack of affordable housing;
- Inadequate public transportation;
- Need for education, training and employment;
- Limited support(s) for youth;
- Poor access to health and mental health services;
- Violence against Indigenous women and girls;
- Food insecurity;
- Involvement in the criminal justice system.

The community engagement sessions also identified what is working for urban Indigenous communities and service providers, as well as the barriers they face to achieving positive outcomes.

## What's working for Indigenous communities and service providers:

### **Access to Culturally Appropriate**

**Services** – Services and programs are most effective when delivered by organizations that recognize the distinct cultural traditions and needs of Indigenous community members. Client-centred and culture-based services that are responsive to the needs of clients, while meeting program objectives, are foundational.

### **Indigenous Culture and Diversity** –

Builds on the strengths and local assets of a community rather than only seeking to focus on community deficits and needs; highlights areas in which communities can be leaders and drivers of change.

**Community Gatherings** – Coming together as a community allows for greater relationship building, community building and development.

### **Meaningful Engagement in Planning, Policy and Program Development** –

Participation of urban Indigenous service providers and communities in local planning processes and in provincial policy and program development creates the opportunity for governments to implement more effective responses to local needs, enhances Indigenous leadership and leverages the expertise and knowledge in urban Indigenous communities. This is best supported when engagement processes are developed in collaboration with Indigenous partners, and where there is capacity funding to support engagement.

### **Creation and Support of Safe Spaces** –

Service delivery that is free from lateral violence, anti-Indigenous racism, homophobia and gender-based violence. Safe spaces for Indigenous individuals, families and communities are accepting and respectful of identities and diversity, including culture, gender, ability, sexual orientation, language, socio-economic differences, age and experience.

### **Building Local and Regional**

**Relationships** – Allows for more effective community development and opens up opportunities to address social and economic issues facing communities in more wholistic, collaborative ways. Sharing information builds on existing community strengths and can counter issues of guarding resources and siloed approaches.

**Creating Local Solutions** – To more effectively respond to local needs through the recognition of the diversity of urban Indigenous communities, including their histories, traditions and priorities.

**Integrated Service Planning** – Aligning and planning service delivery collaboratively and more effectively using existing resources. It can also identify gaps in services, and creates opportunities to take multidisciplinary approaches to developing and delivering services. The Indigenous community hub model of service delivery is a best practice and example of this, which allows for improved access to a wider range of wholistic programs and services for community members, and encourages service delivery organizations to work more closely together to address community priorities.

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Indigenous organizations work together to provide the needed resources and services to put the client first. However, inflexible program requirements and a focus on quantitative measures (e.g., age criteria, number of clients served) can result in barriers to accessing any or all of the resources and supports that could benefit Indigenous community members.

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### **Barriers and challenges faced by urban Indigenous service providers:**

#### **Lack of Supports for Youth and Seniors –**

Additional emphasis on, and support for, youth and seniors in policy and program development is required.

#### **Cultural Conflict and Systemic Racism –**

There is an urgent need for greater cultural competency, understanding and awareness of Indigenous cultures in urban settings; need for awareness-raising and respecting the diversity and distinct realities of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in urban areas.

#### **Competition for, or Lack of, Resources –**

Service providers are competing against each other for available funding, creating mistrust between agencies, making partnerships and relationship-building a challenge. When funding is more limited these tensions are increased.

#### **Lack of Indigenous Representation and Control –**

Indigenous service providers can be excluded from local planning processes and find that their perspectives

are not incorporated into the development of government policies and programs. Frequently, their involvement is strictly advisory with little to no accountability back to the community.

#### **Need to Support Service Provider Capacity –**

There is a need for greater resources to support the provision and coordination of community-driven, culture-based programs and services to meet local needs, as well as for infrastructure and minor capital funding to establish and/or maintain safe community and service delivery spaces.

**Funding Administration Burden –** Service providers receive funding from many different sources, with different reporting requirements, different funding timeframes and may not be flexible to align with organization mandates/needs on the ground. The administration to support multiple sources of fixed-term funding is operationally burdensome.







## A SHARED VISION

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan envisions respectful relationships with Indigenous people as the foundation of all policy, programming and interactions between the province of Ontario and urban Indigenous organizations and communities.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### A FOUNDATION FOR THE URBAN INDIGENOUS ACTION PLAN

The following guiding principles provide the foundation for positive and productive relationships, policies and programs that are working to improve the wellbeing of urban Indigenous communities. These guiding principles inform how the actions across each of the Urban Indigenous Action Plan's action areas are viewed and implemented:

#### Respect for Indigenous Cultures and Spiritualities

Indigenous cultures and spiritualities are recognized and respected, with the acknowledgement that they provide the foundation of identity for many Indigenous people. Indigenous expertise in Indigenous cultures is recognized, and community-based approaches are understood as essentially linked to positive outcomes.

#### Indigenous Leadership

Urban Indigenous communities and organizations have involvement and responsibility over research, planning, development, delivery and evaluation of policies, programs and services for urban First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.

#### Collaboration and Co-Development

Collaboration and co-development recognizes the value of Indigenous expertise and knowledge to design, plan, implement and evaluate public policy and programs that impact the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. Collaboration and co-development respect existing protocols and governance approaches of urban Indigenous communities and organizations.

#### Respect for Indigenous Diversity

The distinctions and diversity of First Nation, Métis and Inuit people(s) across Ontario is recognized and respected. Additionally, recognition and consideration is given to the diversities within these communities, including gender, sexual orientation, age, language, religion, ability and socioeconomic differences.

## Transparency and Accountability

Clear roles and responsibilities support and strengthen mutual accountability between urban Indigenous organizations and communities and the province of Ontario. Trust is built through open processes and clear/regular communication.

## Responsive to Community Priorities

Community-identified needs and priorities provide the basis for policy and program development. This includes flexibility to adapt policies and programs to ensure best outcomes for the community.

## Cross-Government Coordination

Coordination between government ministries and their service delivery partners is foundational for effective delivery of

services and increasing their impact. Coordination also requires building upon the strengths of existing programs, resources and partnerships of urban Indigenous communities and organizations.

## Equity and Access

Equitable access requires working to address barriers to ensure all urban Indigenous people are able to receive services, regardless of geographic or physical location. Special attention must be given to ensure the needs of women, youth, seniors, people with disabilities, LGBTQ2S and other diverse groups are considered during policy and program development, delivery and evaluation. Barriers to accessing and receiving equitable service need to be examined, and services must seek to create and nurture safe spaces for all urban Indigenous people.





## ACTION AREAS

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The actions outlined in the Urban Indigenous Action Plan have been designed to act as a starting point, recognizing that depending on the initiative, approaches must be flexible to the unique needs of communities and organizations, and must include support for capacity.

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The action areas for the Urban Indigenous Action Plan have been designed to respond to what was heard from communities about what is working locally, as well as the challenges that need to be addressed to improve overall wellbeing in Ontario's cities and towns.

The action areas set a minimum standard for how Ontario ministries engage with and support Indigenous communities, organizations and service providers. The actions outlined in the Urban Indigenous Action Plan have been designed to act as a starting point, recognizing that depending on the initiative, approaches must be flexible to the unique needs of communities and organizations, and must include support for capacity. The actions and approaches in the Urban Indigenous Action Plan are not exhaustive, and must take into account the progress, relationships and innovative work of local communities and organizations across the province.

The action areas build on the guiding principles, which serve as a foundation of all actions under the Urban Indigenous Action Plan.

## ACTION AREA 1: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

**Desired Outcome** – Relationships between governments and urban Indigenous organizations and service providers are respectful, transparent, responsive, and accountable.

**Responds to** – *What's Working: Meaningful Engagement in Planning, Policy and Program Development; Building Local and Regional Relationships.*  
– *Barriers and Challenges: Lack of Indigenous Representation and Control.*

Emphasized throughout the process of developing the Urban Indigenous Action Plan was the notion that building relationships with urban Indigenous communities and organizations is based first on mutual respect and understanding of the unique diversity and culture of Métis, First Nations and Inuit people(s) in urban areas. Relationship building is best achieved through effective communication and information-exchanges among local service providers and networks, provincial-level partners and communities, to inform decision-making. Strong relationships allow for meaningful engagement, collaborative processes and true partnerships, which are critical for effective policy and program development.

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan recognizes that strengthening or creating relationships needs to start with education for governments and non-Indigenous organizations to understand unique Indigenous cultural and organizational/governance distinctions. Understanding communities and organizational protocols supports this development of mutual respect and understanding.

### 1. Create and build on opportunities to develop cultural awareness.

- a. As part of Ontario's ongoing work to develop meaningful relationships, trust and understanding with urban Indigenous communities, organizations and service providers, ministries to:
  - i. Increase opportunities for organizational, frontline and community cultural awareness training that is reflective of local needs and perspectives, and which are led or identified by urban Indigenous communities or organizations.
  - ii. Increase knowledge and understanding of community priorities.
  - iii. Demonstrate familiarity of the landscape of urban Indigenous communities and organizations, including incorporating and respecting protocols.
  - iv. Participate in community meetings, gatherings and other partnership-building opportunities, as appropriate.

2. **Support the development of meaningful partnerships at local and regional levels between urban Indigenous organizations and service delivery partners and with municipalities.**
  - a. Ontario to invest in community initiatives that aim to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members together.
  - b. Ministries to provide guidance and/or direction to their sector-specific service delivery partners or municipalities to engage and build relationships with local urban Indigenous community organizations and networks/coalitions.
  - c. In collaboration with urban Indigenous organizations, Ontario to share information around wise practices in networking, relationship-building and partnerships.
3. **Strengthen wholistic program delivery by supporting existing and emerging local, regional and provincial networks.**
  - a. Ontario to encourage the development and maintenance of networks and partnerships among and between urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, communities and governments to facilitate communications and relationship development, with particular focus on the need to:
    - i. Provide capacity for urban Indigenous communities and service provider participation in networks.
    - ii. Establish safe and appropriate forums for networks and relationships.
    - iii. Enhance communication and information-sharing that can be adapted locally, including through:
      - The development of virtual/online networks.
      - Ensuring urban Indigenous communities are connected with local and/or provincial government and service delivery partners and municipalities prior to the development of policies, programs or planning initiatives.



## ACTION AREA 2: POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND CO-DEVELOPMENT

**Desired Outcome** – Policy development processes incorporate, reflect and respect the voices and diversities of urban Indigenous communities.

**Responds to** – *What's Working*: Meaningful engagement in planning, policy and program development.

– *Barriers and Challenges*: Lack of Indigenous representation and control.

Enhancing urban Indigenous representation and leadership in policy-making includes building on the expertise and knowledge in communities to develop sustainable policy solutions, and ensuring that urban Indigenous partners have more than an advisory role during policy-making processes. Improving reciprocal accountability between government and communities is also a key component.

Policy engagement entails working with urban Indigenous communities and organizations, and recognizing the value of Indigenous expertise and knowledge, to design, plan, implement and evaluate public policy initiatives that impact the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. Programs and services often fail to reflect Indigenous values, beliefs, traditions and experiences, including gendered experiences, which can decrease uptake and effectiveness in dealing with issues faced by urban Indigenous communities. Early and inclusive policy engagement is crucial to ensuring that policies and associated programs meaningfully respond to the issues they are intended to address. This is best supported when engagement processes are developed in collaboration with Indigenous partners, and where there is capacity funding to support engagement.

Co-development requires that government partners directly involve urban Indigenous communities and organizations as equal partners in planning, developing, implementing and evaluating policies and programs for urban Indigenous people. Co-development creates opportunities for urban Indigenous communities to exercise leadership and enhanced decision-making in policies that impact community members. This allows for more focus on Indigenous strengths, resiliency, autonomy and culture and builds on self-determining networks and infrastructure, thereby strengthening Indigenous communities and nurturing cultural identity.





1. **Ministries to ensure cultural competency and awareness training and capacity on the part of leadership, staff and contracted service providers is in place prior to engagement with urban Indigenous organizations, including familiarity and demonstrated respect for protocols for engagement with communities and organizations.**
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Best practices for policy engagement across ministries can include: aligning engagement on similar initiatives or issues; ensuring the timely distribution of materials; administration and summary report assistance; sector and project- or engagement-specific capacity/support; proactive communication; central storage for sharing and compiling information; and clear timelines for approvals and decision-making processes.

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2. **Ministries to work with urban Indigenous organizations and communities to develop locally and culturally driven approaches to policy engagement.**
  - a. Ministries to collaborate internally and across government and externally with urban Indigenous organizations to align provincial engagements and initiatives. Ministries to provide notification to urban Indigenous leadership on policy development and seek their advice on engagement.
  - b. Ministries to provide notice to urban Indigenous organizations of upcoming provincial initiatives through existing or new policy engagement and co-development tables.
  - c. Ministries to work with urban Indigenous organizations and communities to identify approaches for engagement, including recognition of local traditions and preferences.
    - i. Requires support for culturally rooted and urban Indigenous community-led participation in policy and program development.
    - ii. Processes to begin by identifying the appropriate engagement approach with urban Indigenous organizations and communities, including who should be engaged through the appropriate and agreed-upon approaches.
    - iii. Ensure diverse groups within communities are given equal opportunity to engage, including women, youth, seniors, people with disabilities and those who identify as LGBTQ2S.

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Steps towards more meaningful engagement can include: advance notice and communication with organizations and communities prior to beginning any engagement process; multiple check-ins and points of contact with the established organization/community representatives; developing protocols for how information gathered from the community/organization will be used; and planning time in the process for community verification, validation and any necessary follow-up.

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### **3. Support urban Indigenous communities and organizations in strategic policy-making and priority planning.**

- a. The province to continue opportunities for provincial urban Indigenous leadership to meaningfully participate in policy priority setting.
- b. Ministries to provide necessary resources, such as dedicated funding, to directly support urban Indigenous organizations and communities in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs that impact urban Indigenous people.
- c. The Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR), in collaboration with urban Indigenous organizations, to provide guidance and communicate best practices for policy engagement across ministries.



## ACTION AREA 3: SERVICE PLANNING, DESIGN AND DELIVERY

**Desired Outcome** – Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, service providers and governments are partners in local and provincial policy and program design and delivery to respond to current and future needs of communities.

**Desired Outcome** – Programs and services are accessible, person-centred, culturally rooted and delivered in safe, culturally sensitive environments. Particular attention is given to diversity within urban Indigenous communities, including the needs of Indigenous women, youth, families, seniors, people with disabilities and LGBTQ2S.

**Responds to** – *What's Working:* Integrated Service Planning, Creating Local Solutions; One-Stop Service Hubs; Client-Centred Focus and Culture-Based.

– *Barriers and Challenges:* Competition for, or Lack of, Resources; Need to Support Service Provider Capacity; Lack of Indigenous Representation and Control; Funding Administration Burden.

Coordination within and across governments and Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers on program design and delivery and data collection is necessary to reduce engagement fatigue and ensure urban Indigenous organizations and service providers are able to effectively serve their clients. To best achieve this, organizations require the capacity to meaningfully participate in these processes, which will lead to better outcomes for community members.

Service delivery can include the delivery of publicly-funded human services such as public health, community safety, education, housing, employment and training, early years and child care, recreation and other social services. To best deliver these services, service planning is the process of addressing service delivery barriers and of anticipating and identifying current and future needs and priorities for the delivery of services and supports within a community.

### 1. Ensure flexibility for culture-based approaches and cultural sensitivity in service planning, design and delivery.

- a. Ministries to work with urban Indigenous organizations, communities and other stakeholders to ensure that integrated, community-driven, culturally safe and culturally sensitive service planning and culturally rooted service delivery models at provincial and local levels are supported.

## **2. Address barriers to accessing and delivering services.**

- a. The province to identify opportunities and build on existing approaches to reduce administrative burdens for and funding competition between urban Indigenous organizations.
  - b. Ministries, when undertaking new and existing program design and development, to consider barriers to delivering and accessing programs and services, such as transportation, infrastructure, geography and affordability.
  - c. The province, working with Indigenous organizations, to develop an Indigenous gender-based lens/tool to pilot in MIRR-led programs, with the aim of implementing the tool more broadly across the Ontario Public Service (OPS).
    - i. Tool to assist in the development of new policies, programs and services in priority areas; and,
    - ii. Tool to ensure ministries consider the impacts for Indigenous women, including issues of safety and accessibility.
  - d. Ministries to lead by example and to encourage or otherwise use their influence with service managers and municipalities to develop flexible program funding streams, based on the locally identified needs of communities.
  - e. Ministries, in collaboration with urban Indigenous organizations, to develop innovative or alternative service delivery approaches, where appropriate.
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Innovative or alternative service delivery can include co-location of provincial programming in urban Indigenous organizations and/or Indigenous organizations that are the primary service delivery partners for the service or program to their respective community members.

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## **3. Support urban Indigenous community service delivery infrastructure, beyond current commitments, to achieve or improve service delivery outcomes.**

- a. Ministries to dedicate Indigenous-specific resources when planning investments and delivering community program funding.
- b. Ministries to support and align provincial and federal initiatives, commitments and investments across priorities and sectors.
- c. Ministries to work with urban Indigenous organizations, service managers and municipalities to improve local, regional and provincial service coordination and alignment.

- d. Ministries to support the involvement of urban Indigenous organizations and communities in local planning and program development processes with municipalities and service managers.
- e. Service planning and delivery to, where possible, build on existing urban Indigenous community hub models of service delivery that are culturally rooted and effectively provide access to a wide range of wholistic programs and services for Indigenous community members, particularly those in underserved areas. This is best supported and achieved by ensuring that:
  - i. Services are designed to be culturally based and respond to the needs of community members; and,
  - ii. Cultural awareness/sensitivity training and cultural safety and broader safety considerations for diverse communities and sub-populations, within their local community context, are considered.

#### **4. Ministries to direct and otherwise encourage meaningful accountability to communities.**

- a. Ministries to encourage and use their influence to ensure that service managers and municipalities increase reporting back to communities and urban Indigenous organizations.

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Indigenous community hubs are recognized as valued gathering places emerging from the vision and will of communities, where community members can access a wide range of wrap-around, locally driven programs in safe spaces. Indigenous community hubs deliver holistic, culture-based programs and services in areas such as justice, children and youth, family support, education, employment and training, and healing and wellness in communities across Ontario.

Active in local relationship-building, networking and partnership development, Indigenous community hubs fulfill a unique social planning function towards driving meaningful change in our communities. Involvement in a growing number of local, regional and provincial initiatives highlights the important knowledge transfer and leadership functions inherent in Indigenous community hubs.

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## ACTION AREA 4: EVALUATION

**Desired Outcome** – Data, analysis and evaluation informs the continuous improvement of policies and programs that impact urban Indigenous communities.

**Responds to** – *What's Working*: Sharing Information; Client-Centred Focus and Culture-Based; Indigenous Culture and Diversity.

Communities across Ontario have spoken clearly to the importance of outcomes measurement in ensuring accountability, in ensuring that the Urban Indigenous Action Plan is driving positive change, and in recognizing the opportunity for changing the landscape around how data is collected and used in urban Indigenous communities.

The purpose of the Evaluation Action Area is to support and promote effective data, analysis and evaluation of programs and initiatives that impact urban Indigenous communities. The use of culturally rooted and community-driven measurement indicators and supporting community leadership in the measurement of progress are key aspects of relationship building, empowerment and greater participation of urban Indigenous communities and organizations in evaluation. The collection of appropriate race-based data will allow for more accurate reporting of the impact of policies and programming on urban Indigenous communities. Existing publicly available data, such as data from the census, Aboriginal Peoples' Survey and Canadian Community Health Survey, may be used as an interim measure for baseline data, which will serve for comparison and measuring progress on the impact of improved service delivery guided by the Urban Indigenous Action Plan.

The following series of actions are related to, and build on, broader provincial commitments to data, analysis, evaluation and outcomes measurement and will also assist in facilitating measurement and public reporting on the Urban Indigenous Action Plan.

### 1. Strengthen data collection and analysis.

- a. Ministries to make resources available to support data collection, storage, analysis and measurement activities in the development, design and delivery of policies and programs.
- b. Ministries, urban Indigenous organizations, non-Indigenous organizations and other service delivery partners are encouraged to collect data based on the guidance of Indigenous people, organizations and communities, including the consideration of Indigenous data governance principles and gender-based analysis.
- c. Data collection to be carried out in collaboration with ministries and urban Indigenous organizations and communities based on qualitative and quantitative collection methods that are culturally relevant and safe for program recipients, and can allow for greater comparison across program areas, geographic locations and organizations.

- d. Ministries, in collaboration with urban Indigenous organizations, to identify opportunities to strengthen frontline training in urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous service delivery organizations to carry out data collection, build awareness of issues and considerations in collecting sensitive data and address communities' questions on the sensitive data being collected.

## 2. Supporting outcomes-informed policy and program development.

- a. Ministries to ensure programs are flexible to adapt to the results of evaluation throughout the policy development cycle to reach the desired outcomes.
- b. Evaluation results to serve as an evidence base to inform future decision-making about improvements to service delivery, program design and development of new programs. Based on the results of evaluations, programs and initiatives to be adapted to improve outcomes and wellbeing for urban Indigenous communities.

To implement these actions, Ontario recognizes that Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations and service providers, as well as ministries, would need to report regularly on the results of evaluation to assess whether programs are achieving the outcomes of the Urban Indigenous Action Plan. Sharing evaluation information will strengthen program design and service delivery to urban Indigenous people and communities.







# MEASURING AND REPORTING ON PROGRESS

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan includes ongoing measurement and public reporting on progress of the desired outcomes. This will build on the strengths of communities and will strive to build on the Performance Measurement Framework of Key Performance Indicators (or suitable substitute indicators). Performance measurement is a continual process that acknowledges a need for flexibility and may need a revised approach as improved data collection and its information becomes available.

While it will be difficult to attribute broader socio-economic impacts solely to the Urban Indigenous Action Plan, other ministry evaluation initiatives tracking population-level indicators of wellbeing will provide important context about the different ways in which Ontario and urban Indigenous organizations and communities are making positive contributions to socio-economic change.

## CONCLUSION TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS AND POLICY FOR ONTARIO

The Urban Indigenous Action Plan establishes a standard for the government of Ontario for working in partnership with urban Indigenous communities and organizations. The commitments and actions laid out in this document offer workable approaches and solutions across the short, medium and long-term and can build on or enhance the existing partnerships and initiatives taking place across the province.

Moving forward, the Urban Indigenous Action Plan will act as a comprehensive starting point for Ontario's policy commitments, investments and initiatives that affect urban Indigenous communities and organizations.

While the Urban Indigenous Action Plan is primarily a guide for provincial ministries and the broader public service, this framework can be adapted and used as a starting point for communities to guide or inform their

work with other levels of government, such as municipalities, and other service delivery partners or organizations across communities in Ontario.

While transformative in nature, the Urban Indigenous Action Plan recognizes the complexity of the service delivery landscape and existing efforts underway across urban Indigenous communities. It also recognizes the benefits currently being realized from these partnerships, which are working towards achieving their local priorities and desired outcomes. The Urban Indigenous Action Plan will look different across communities and across the range of programs, services and initiatives seeking to strengthen wellbeing and improve opportunities and services for urban Indigenous communities. The Urban Indigenous Action Plan is another layer in a strong foundation necessary for the path to reconciliation in Ontario.

# **The Urban Indigenous** **ACTION PLAN**



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