



# OUR PLACE, OUR HOME, OUR VISION

**YOUTH VOICES**  
**OF EAST VANCOUVER**

**POLICY CONFERENCE REPORT MAY 2020**





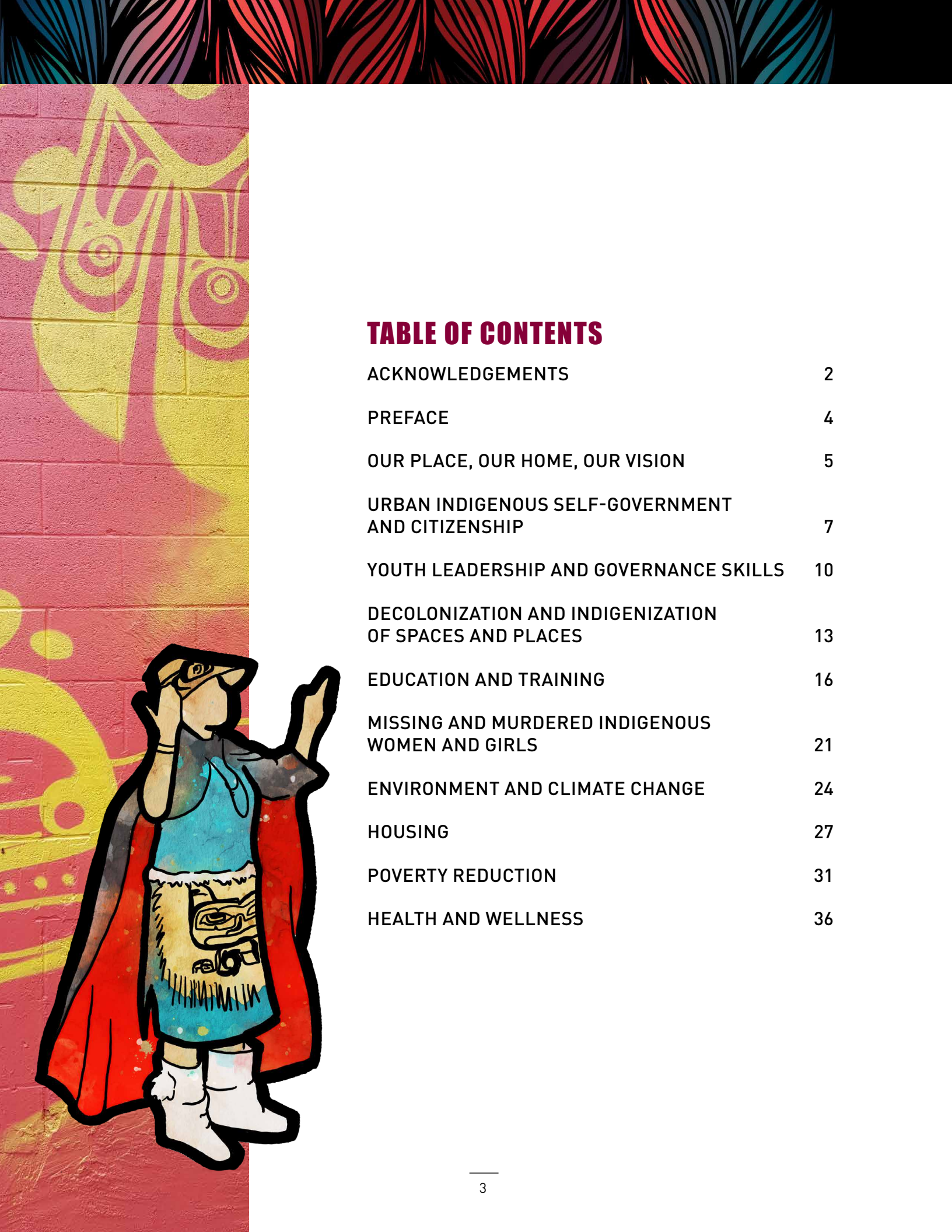
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Aboriginal Life in Vancouver Enhancement Society would like to acknowledge that our project took place on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh.



We also wish to acknowledge and thank all the Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth who participated in our project through volunteerism and sharing their ideas, experiences and perspectives.

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The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that young people have a human right to be consulted about the decisions that affect their lives.<sup>1</sup>

In our work, Aboriginal Life in Vancouver Enhancement Society (ALIVE) has an ongoing objective of assisting Indigenous youth to become more acquainted with the provisions of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) as well as the main themes of the Declaration:

- The right to be free of discrimination - Article 2
- The right to self-determination - Article 3
- The right to be recognized as distinct peoples - Article 5
- The right to free, prior and informed consent - Article 32 (2)

It was not feasible in the course of one policy conference to provide a comprehensive outlook on all the issues and concerns affecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in East Vancouver. We chose nine policy areas to focus on and through youth-to-youth dialogue recommendations were made. First and foremost in our thoughts is the hard truth that ongoing colonial forces continue to shape policies and actions in our community. This report provides a good introduction to the nine policy areas and a platform for future work.

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## OUR PLACE, OUR HOME, OUR VISION

**INDIGENOUS YOUTH ARE THE FASTEST GROWING POPULATION  
AND CANADA NEEDS TO LISTEN TO WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY**

*-Youth Participant*

In February 2019, ALIVE received funding from Employment and Social Development Canada to undertake an innovative Canada Service Corps project entitled, *Our Place, Our Home, Our Vision*. From February 2019 to May 2020, ALIVE and its partner organization Britannia Community Services Centre, worked to engage, educate and empower Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth from the community of East Vancouver. The objectives included the engagement, education and empowerment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth from East Vancouver to come together in a sustainable and meaningful way to discuss, strategize and respond to the major problems facing them today.

The City of Vancouver identifies the following communities as being part of the East Vancouver area: Grandview-Woodland, Hastings-Sunrise, Strathcona, Downtown Eastside and Mount Pleasant. The majority of youth who participated in our project were from these five areas. East Vancouver has a strong geographic presence, as well as a diverse and dynamic community identity.

Vancouver has the third largest population of Indigenous peoples in Canada after Winnipeg and Edmonton. There are at least 35 First Nations represented in the city; however, many observers have indicated that there are also members of almost all of the 200 British Columbia *Indian Act* bands.<sup>2</sup> Three Coast Salish Nations are Indigenous to this area: Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh. The city is also home to diverse First Nations, Métis and Inuit from all over the country.

This is an important time for Indigenous youth to work collectively so that our generation can finally succeed in the struggle for self-government and self-determination for urban Indigenous peoples. With the guidance and support of the rights and principles in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, this emerging generation has an opportunity to finally end domination, dispossession and disempowerment.

Knowledge is power and through our collective work, Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in East Vancouver can now have a greater awareness and understanding of the historical impacts of colonization and assimilation policies of the Crown. With this knowledge, youth can be a vital catalyst against significant political, social and economic challenges and initiate positive change.

2 Roy Todd. "Urban Aboriginal Governance: Developments and Issues," *Not Strangers in These Parts – Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, D. Newhouse and E. Peters (eds.) Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative. [2003] p.257.





Young people want change and we owe it to them to not only listen, but to also take concrete actions. We must continue to support them as they advocate for the changes they want to see and provide opportunities for them to have their voices heard. Young people play a vital role in shaping our tomorrow, so ensuring that they have the right supports and opportunities to be heard will ensure a better future for everyone. Through this project, youth are once again talking to us and asking us to listen to them and respond to their very real concerns and aspirations.

## URBAN INDIGENOUS SELF-GOVERNMENT AND CITIZENSHIP

“WE’RE FRUSTRATED WITH THE GOVERNMENT’S SLOW RESPONSE TO THE 94 CALLS TO ACTION FROM THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

-Youth Participant

“GOOD LIVING IS DETERMINED THROUGH SELF-GOVERNMENT, GOOD EDUCATION, GOOD HOUSING AND GOOD HEALTH

-Youth Participant

### CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT

Article 3 of UNDRIP states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.


Translating this basic human right into the urban environment is a top priority for all urban Indigenous peoples and our representative organizations. The movement to reassert Indigenous self-government and self-determination is taking place around the world, while at the same time, Indigenous peoples are moving into the cities in order to access economic opportunities. In Canada, there is substantial risk that urban Indigenous peoples will be completely left out of self-government and self-determination processes because of the federal government’s distinctions-based approach and the complex intergovernmental relations involved. The challenge is to build political institutions that urban Indigenous peoples can trust and to do this working with the various jurisdictions operating in the urban environment.

Canada’s youth policies must clearly reflect the rights and principles of UNDRIP, which is the most advanced and comprehensive Declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples. Most importantly, youth need to understand that UNDRIP does not create new rights, but rather elaborates on the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples and that the Declaration represents the minimum content of the rights of Indigenous peoples. UN Special Rapporteur, James Anaya, described the importance of UNDRIP as:

“...an authoritative common understanding, at the global level, of the **minimum content** [emphasis added] of the rights of indigenous peoples, upon a foundation of various sources of international human rights law.”<sup>3</sup>

3 Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples*, S. James Anaya, UN Doc. A/HRC/9/9 (11 August 2008) at para. 85 (Conclusions).





Addressing the questions and issues concerning the relationship between Canada as a post-colonial society and pre-existing Indigenous societies lies at the core of Indigenous self-government and self-determination. For Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, new ways of thinking are required that raise additional questions and dialogue about our political and cultural identities. This process is particularly well suited to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth who are already sensitized to dominant colonial ideologies and wish to understand the history of colonization and assimilation.

The UN has produced a youth-friendly version of UNDRIP to assist Indigenous youth in advocating for their rights by using this powerful tool. The plain language used in the youth-friendly version is very helpful, especially in clarifying the terminology used by the UN, which can be quite challenging. The objective of spreading knowledge concerning UNDRIP within Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities was strongly supported by our youth participants.

How to engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in sustainable, community-based structures that support their needs within the wider urban community is a challenge. This challenge provides an opportunity to think about options concerning urban Indigenous governance, since there are many obstacles and opportunities to consider. Participants were supportive of status-blind policies that are not limited to specific Indigenous identities.

Our youth participants understood the importance of building relationships between federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions and urban Indigenous peoples. At the same time, developing these meaningful relationships must also increase opportunities for Indigenous youth to develop knowledge and understanding of governance at the local and regional level. Most importantly, Indigenous youth understand that urban communities and organizations need to be seen as equal partners in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs and services.

*“All Canadian children and youth deserve to know Canada’s honest history, including what happened in the residential schools, and to appreciate the rich history and knowledge of Indigenous nations, which continue to make such a strong contribution to Canada, including our very name and collective identity as a country. For Canadians from all walks of life, reconciliation offers a new way of living together.”*

- TRC Final Report, Volume 6

Indigenous youth from East Vancouver are frustrated with the slow implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action. In addition, the high number of Indigenous youth who experience poverty, homelessness and incarceration and who struggle with mental health and addictions clearly demonstrates that substantive failure has taken place and it is unconscionable that these issues persist in a city and province with so much wealth and opportunity.

Public misunderstanding concerning Indigenous and treaty rights continue to hinder the development of meaningful partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. Mobilizing our youth to become agents of change in East Vancouver requires awareness and understanding of the 94 Calls to Action and what constitutes Indigenous and treaty rights. The goal of reconciliation will require ongoing participation of our youth dialoguing with non-Indigenous youth. Our youth believe the process should begin with education, acknowledging past and current injustices and developing respect for the rights, values and traditions of Indigenous peoples.





## Recommendations

- **Increase awareness and understanding of UNDRIP**, specifically Article 3 and the right to self-determination, through meaningful discussion, activities and experiences;
- **Review Canada's youth policies** to ensure they clearly reflect the rights and principles of UNDRIP;
- **Undertake youth-to-youth programs** that increase awareness and understanding of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action;
- **Distribute youth-friendly versions of UNDRIP** in settings where youth-to-youth exchanges are taking place to increase awareness and understanding of the Declaration;
- Through increased engagement with federal, provincial and municipal governments, **youth are seeking opportunities to participate and advance ideas for positive change** in East Vancouver;
- **Improve communications** with senior federal officials to facilitate systemic support and engagement on urban self-government in East Vancouver;
- **Seek establishment of a multilateral planning process** including federal, provincial and municipal intergovernmental coordination and cooperation;
- **Develop knowledge and understanding of planning, development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs and services** through youth-to-youth centred activities in partnership with organizations that have expertise;
- **Undertake research focussed on mobility and migration issues** in connection with urban Indigenous peoples in East Vancouver to highlight the associated problems with self-government;
- **Establish a network of urban Indigenous organizations** to advance, through dialogue and partnerships, the goal of self-determination for urban Indigenous peoples.

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE SKILLS

**HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THESE NEW LEADERS SO THEY CAN CONTINUE THE IMPORTANT WORK OF RECONCILIATION AND GOVERNANCE?**

*Youth Participant*

**WE NEED YOUTH LEADERSHIP TO WORK WITH THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY AND WE NEED TO FOCUS ON WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS**

*-Youth Participant*

### CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT


In British Columbia, 78% of Indigenous peoples are now living in urban and off-reserve areas. Indigenous people in the province tend to be younger with approximately 30.8% of the Indigenous population being between the ages of 15 and 34.<sup>4</sup> For this sector of Indigenous peoples, marginalization and social exclusion remain disturbing and powerful issues showing that post-colonial attitudes and institutions remain significant factors impeding progress.

The need for leadership and governance development focused on urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth living in East Vancouver is a top strategic priority identified at the policy conference. Leadership development is the starting point where emerging youth leaders can be free of judgement and develop the confidence and skills necessary to thrive in an intense political environment. Training and inspiring a new generation of leaders is a core activity providing opportunity for all youth to understand that anyone can develop these skills. Through long term and intergenerational approaches, youth in East Vancouver can develop the skills and assets to contribute to governance and ultimately to the well-being of their community.

For youth growing up in East Vancouver, there are enormous pressures from racism, discrimination, bullying, poverty and inequality, body image issues and sexual pressures, accompanied by internet culture which contains messages of assimilation and uncertainty concerning the future. A bold and renewed process founded on forward thinking and the principles of UNDRIP will allow Indigenous youth to gain the knowledge and skills required to succeed in leadership and governance to deal with these pressures. Understanding how to build effective networks will be particularly important for youth facing urban pressures and to build their personal resilience and well-being.

<sup>4</sup> Government of British Columbia. Urban & Off-Reserve Aboriginal People. (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/supporting-communities/urban-off-reserve-aboriginal-people>) [accessed April 27, 2020]





Non-Indigenous and Indigenous youth recognize that a key challenge will be developing effective leadership and innovative governance models that blend traditional Indigenous practices with existing post-colonial models. To be confident in the art of governance, as well as having the skill and persistence to practice them, are important goals for emerging youth leaders. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth are very interested in making a difference in the community, despite the subject of governance appearing to many as dull and boring and not readily seen as connected to getting things done.

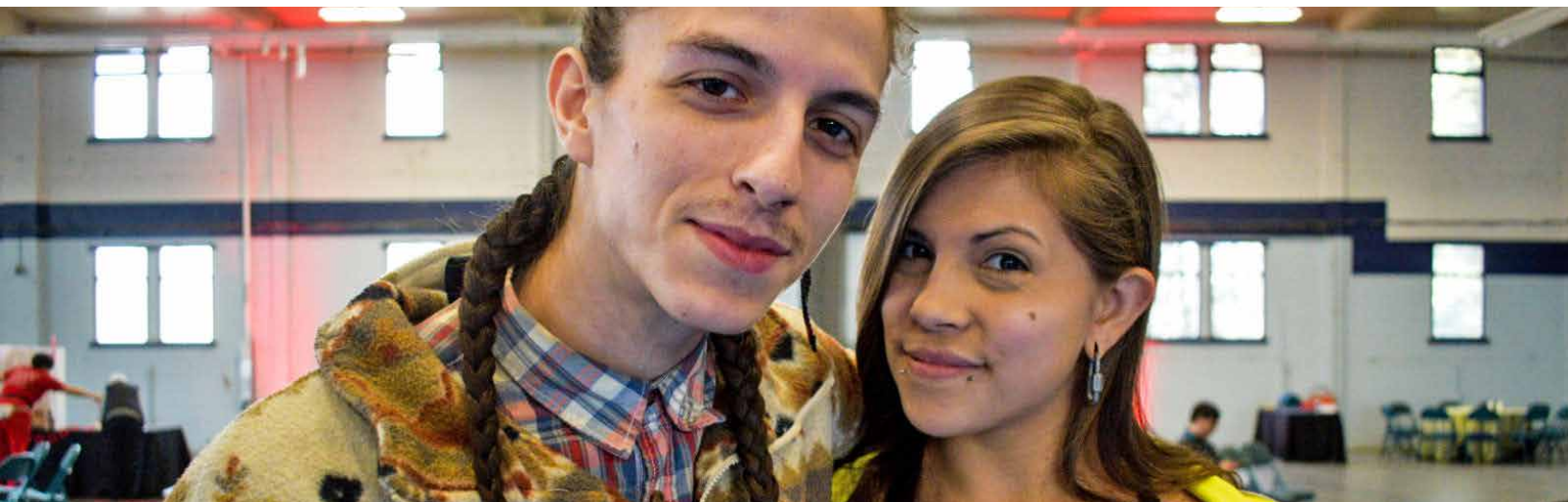
## **Leadership Skills**

Our policy conference participants discussed how to equip the next generation of youth leaders with knowledge and skills. A confident, capable and engaged youth leadership will need to be ready to take on the various governance positions in the community and to actively seek positive outcomes.

Restoring Indigenous leadership in an urban context involves introducing Indigenous youth to wise practices and how our ancestors undertook traditional successful leadership. Shaking off colonial influences and advancing Indigenous values means that our youth will need to develop the ability to walk in two worlds. For example, the storytelling model is a central part of Coast Salish tradition, where youth learn through stories about how past leaders and communities met challenges and adapted to the forces of assimilation and modernity. In the traditional model, youth learned the value of deep listening and the important requirements of patience and practice. Responsive leadership working in balance and harmony with the community has always been an integral part of Indigenous societies. With hands-on experience combined with communication and listening skills, our youth will learn to walk in balance and harmony.

## **Governance Skills**

Governance is a dry term that does not naturally attract the interest of youth; however, once the connection is made with how decision-making takes place in East Vancouver, youth expressed interest in the subject and methods to exert influence at the community level. The key determinants of a successful organization are well known and through workshops, the next generation of youth leaders can learn about what are best practices and how to be better at



exercising power and influence with a youth focus. Boards, advisory groups and committees are looking to youth for new and fresh thinking to solve community issues. Solving specific youth challenges means having a presence and influence at the tables where decisions are being made.

Good governance is a critical component of urban development. Developing skills in governance will involve youth forming positive working relationships with current community leaders, as well as various provincial and municipal committees, agencies and non-governmental organizations. Innovative solutions to issues and concerns will require a strong understanding of the community's diversity and how to successfully engage with various audiences.

Building on the elements and examples from traditional Coast Salish governance is a promising practice for revitalization of East Vancouver. For emerging youth leaders, learning about and implementing Coast Salish governance practices will have a direct and positive impact on strengthening the physical, social, structural and economic parts of the community. Traditional leadership emphasized the importance of leaders having good listening skills when it came to building healthy and strong communities. In traditional governance, the final decision-making powers rested at the community level with an emphasis on inclusiveness and harmony and respect for others and nature. During our conference, youth participants emphasized the pressures of racism, discrimination, acculturation and assimilation in the urban environment. By using traditional storytelling models, mentors can assist Indigenous youth to understand the power of West Coast traditions and stories to educate and heal people who have suffered the effects of these social pressures.



## Recommendations

- **Implementing leadership and governance development workshops** focussed on urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth must be a top strategic priority;
- **Establish a youth advisory board for East Vancouver** to help promote youth leadership and governance skills and to serve as a link between youth, schools city committees and the community;
- **Deliver youth-to-youth workshops** which can play an important role in psychological empowerment and self-realization maximizing the positive contribution that youth can make;
- Promote sustainable and culturally sensitive processes to assist urban Indigenous youth in East Vancouver to **develop leadership and governance skills** through cooperation, peer learning and collaboration;
- **Develop, protect and enhance Indigenous culture, history and traditional forms of leadership and governance** with formal and non-formal learning processes with Elders and key informants;
- Facilitate good urban governance for East Vancouver by effectively **blending traditional Indigenous notions with new models of governance**;
- **Seek political support for sustainable funding and structures** to carry out these recommendations and build the capacity and advocacy skills of Indigenous youth;
- **Provide funding for youth programs** including mentorship, leadership and support services that are broadly accessible to all youth in East Vancouver.



## DECOLONIZATION AND INDIGENIZATION OF SPACES AND PLACES

**WE ARE NOT REPRESENTED ENOUGH ON BOARDS AND COMMITTEES THAT DIRECTLY AFFECT OUR LIVES IN EAST VANCOUVER**

*-Youth Participant*

**WE ARE CALLING FOR AN END TO CULTURAL APPROPRIATION, RACIST IMAGERY AND SYMBOLS OF COLONIZATION AND OPPRESSION**

*-Youth Participant*

### CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT

Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in East Vancouver want to contribute to systemic change through collective solidarity which is stronger than individual actions. Youth understand that making a contribution to this change requires understanding the concepts of decolonization, indigenization and reconciliation. Youth want to be authentically engaged in processes to change systems that reflect Western culture, settler colonialism and European interpretations of history.

The terms decolonization and indigenization are two important and related terms dealing with systemic change. The need for these processes is based on the fact that prior to arrival of the colonizers, Indigenous peoples were independent, self-governing and self-sufficient. British imperialism brought colonization and assimilation policies, which eroded Indigenous traditional governance structures, cultures and languages.

In post World War II years, decolonization was viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government. Today, the term has expanded and is seen as a reference to the long-term process of bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power.<sup>5</sup>

Decolonization means changing how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples view each other and themselves. Decolonization restores the Indigenous worldview, restores culture and traditional ways, and replaces Western interpretations of history with Indigenous perspectives of history.

5 Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/a-brief-definition-of-decolonization-and-indigenization>. [accessed April 7, 2020]



Indigenization means to make subject to native influence. Essentially, the term involves the following elements: recognition of the validity of Indigenous worldviews, knowledge and perspectives; identification of opportunities for indigenuity to be expressed; and incorporation of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing.

Both decolonization and indigenization processes require cooperation by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, governments, institutions and non-governmental organizations to create the spaces and places that are supportive and accommodating for Indigenous peoples. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples proposed that this relationship be based on the principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, sharing and mutual responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth are aware and understand that decolonization and indigenization are ongoing processes and key elements of reconciliation. Indigenous youth also recognize that they have an important role to play in decolonizing institutions and creating spaces that honour Indigenous peoples. Youth see the process as being collaborative and based on Indigenous cultures and traditions that will transform spaces and places. Indigenous perspectives and approaches will assist all youth to understand the fundamental cultural shift that is taking place in Vancouver's institutions and governance structures. The essence of indigenization involves respectful relationships with all Indigenous peoples so that all our cultures and traditional ways are respected and valued. Most importantly, this process is not solely an Indigenous issue, but is beneficial for the entire urban population and paves the way for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Unlearning colonial conditioning and implementing stronger visual representation of Indigenous cultures are processes that have strong appeal to youth. Developing collective efforts to produce systemic change across programs, policies and initiatives taking place in East Vancouver requires capacity so that grassroots youth organizations can foster relationships across the community.

Youth participants are prepared to advocate for change throughout all relevant jurisdictions with a focus on sustaining relationships. Youth from East Vancouver understand the benefits of collective action and the formidable challenge of systemic change. This will require a common vision and collective strategy to integrate goals and objectives into all policies and plans, especially those focussed on youth.

<sup>6</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ottawa: The Commission, 1996. Vol. 1 p. 676-697.





## Recommendations

- **Urban Indigenous youth perspectives need to be included** in all policies and plans for decolonization and indigenization of spaces and places;
- **More visual representation of Indigenous peoples** is needed on flags, signs, architecture and in the naming and co-naming of public spaces;
- **Dedicated seats for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth on City of Vancouver boards** and committees are needed to change institutional cultures and practices;
- **Increased awareness is needed** of National Indigenous Peoples Day, Orange Shirt Day and National Indigenous History Month;
- **Provide youth with more opportunities to be at the centre of decision-making processes**, where priorities are being established and recommendations are being made concerning spaces and places;
- **Courses concerning Indigenous histories, cultures, languages and traditions must be mandatory** at all levels of education, including elementary, high school, college and university;
- Indigenous youth are seeking **dedicated Indigenous spaces** in city hall, the provincial legislature and federal institutions in Vancouver;
- **Policy makers and politicians need to be educated about the positive outcomes** that come from decolonizing and indigenizing spaces and places;
- **Cooperation, peer learning and collaboration** are key to systemic change and ensuring acceleration of this work is a priority;
- **Policy education and training opportunities for Indigenous youth**, including the practical aspects of how to work with policy and decision-makers will facilitate youth active participation and inclusion in decolonization and indigenization of places and spaces.



## EDUCATION AND TRAINING



**EMPOWERING YOURSELF AND STRENGTHENING YOUR  
IDENTITY CAN HELP YOU TO EMPOWER YOUR PEOPLE**

*Youth Participant*



**INDIGENOUS YOUTH NEED EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
TO ADVANCE IN THE COMPETITIVE URBAN WORLD**

*Youth Participant*

## CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* addresses the right to education in Article 14:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education has made a strong commitment to improving the success and supports for Indigenous students and increasing the presence of Indigenous cultures, languages and history in classrooms, as well as bringing Indigenous knowledge into the practice of teaching. Most importantly, Indigenous education in BC will align with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the Draft Principles that Guide the Province of British Columbia's Relationship with Indigenous People.<sup>7</sup>

While recognizing the importance of education in improving the lifelong opportunities for Indigenous peoples, the BC Ministry of Education has acknowledged the low educational

<sup>7</sup> Government of British Columbia. Indigenous Education. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/indigenous-education> (accessed May 14, 2020)





achievements of Indigenous students living off-reserve. Fifteen years ago, the Government of British Columbia made a commitment to achieve parity in educational outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by 2015. In 2019, the Ministry of Education reported that 70% of Indigenous students had achieved Grade 12 graduation in 2017-18, compared to 86% of non-Indigenous students.<sup>8</sup> While there has been improvement in the education system, a significant gap remains in place. According to the Executive Director of the First Nations Education Steering Committee, this educational gap includes the racism of low expectations.<sup>9</sup> In response to accusations that Indigenous students were facing racism in the school system, the Ministry of Education made a public commitment that it would do more to implement non-racist learning environments where “every child should feel safe; Indigenous history, language and culture need to be valued; and educators need to expect that all Indigenous students will graduate.”<sup>10</sup>


Participants at our youth policy conference emphasized that all policies on education and training must be based on anti-racism frameworks. The fact that structural racism and bias exist within the BC education and training systems and Indigenous youth in particular are being discriminated against, indicates that there is no room for complacency. Support for Indigenous students and transformation of their learning experiences must be maintained and strengthened as a top priority.

The barriers that have resulted in high rates of unemployment among Indigenous peoples are not new and are frequently referenced in literature dealing with closing the employment gap: literacy and education; cultural differences; racism/ discrimination/stereotypes; low self-esteem; poverty and poor housing; lack of a driver’s license; transportation; and lack of

8 The Canadian Press. Indigenous grad rate highest ever in B.C. but education gaps remain. June 18, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/indigenous-grad-rate-highest-ever-in-b-c-but-education-gaps-remain-1.5180598> [accessed April 11, 2020]

9 Ibid.

10 Auditor General of British Columbia. An Audit of the Education of Aboriginal Students in the B.C. Public School System. p. 3-4.



affordable child care. Increased education and attainment are closely related to the goal of closing the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Increased training and education provides opportunities for decolonization and empowerment of Indigenous communities. In East Vancouver, there are fundamentally six systemic issues that directly impact the success of Indigenous students in education:

1) governance; 2) funding; 3) language and literacy; 4) teacher supply; 5) transitions; and 6) performance measurement.

Progress on education equity for Indigenous youth is based on the overall goal of education and training being key parts of urban Indigenous self-government. What youth are talking about is transformational change in education systems and institutions. In their education policies, the Government of British Columbia also calls for a transformation of education and the “embedding of Aboriginal perspectives into all parts of the curriculum in a meaningful and authentic manner.” There is also a call for inclusion of the voice of Indigenous people in all aspects of the education system.<sup>11</sup> Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth from East Vancouver are supportive of these educational goals and wish to be included so that youth perspectives are included in policies and plans.

During our policy conference, meaningful dialogue took place to produce guidance and direction from youth to initiate changes to Indigenous education and training in British Columbia. Youth participants stressed the importance of quality high school education opportunities for all, to ensure graduation success, access to quality training and post-secondary education. Lack of appropriate education and training has left many Indigenous youth feeling unprepared for the job market or without access to economic opportunities.

There have been numerous studies and reports looking at the complex social, economic, linguistic and cultural elements that are part of the education environment for Indigenous students. Some common factors that contribute to success in Indigenous education have been identified: effective leadership, creating a welcoming school climate with high expectations, caring and dedicated school staff, adequate funding and strategic use of resources, engagement with the community and forms of governance, and quality programs.<sup>12</sup>

The Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) and the Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF) represented the federal government’s largest investment into Aboriginal labour market programming in the period 2010 to 2015. In 2017, an evaluation of the strategy revealed that significant challenges remained. For example, there was high staff turnover and overburdening of Aboriginal Agreement Holders (AAH) who lacked capacity to deal with administrative duties.

Demand-driven labour market programming was and remains one of the strategic priorities of the ASETS. The essence of the initiative was to ensure that skills development was demand-driven. This meant that the AAHs would take a demand driven approach and align their labour market programming with labour market demands in their region.<sup>13</sup>


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11 Government of British Columbia. Aboriginal Education. [https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/aboriginal\\_education\\_bc.pdf](https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/aboriginal_education_bc.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2020)

12 D. Bell, K.D. Anderson. *Sharing Our Success: Ten Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling*. Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education. p. 11.

13 Evaluation of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Skills and Partnership Fund. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/evaluations/2015-aboriginal-skills.html> (accessed April 18, 2020)





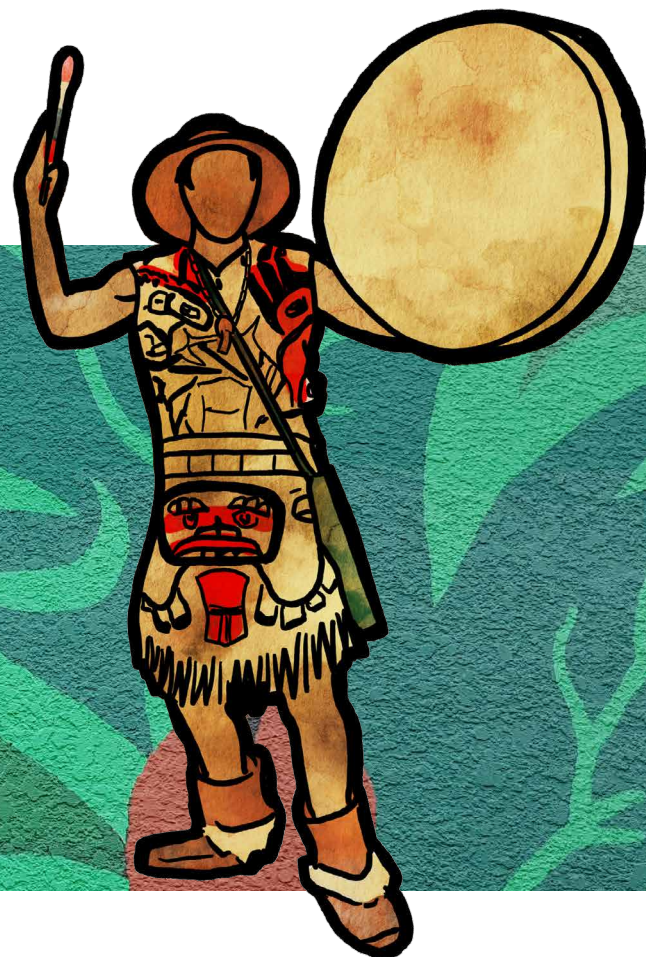
In Section 4.1 of the evaluation dealing with Performance Effectiveness, the issue of the many barriers for Indigenous employment seekers were cited:

Lack of essential skills (life and foundational skills) required culturally appropriate holistic approaches and services, including re-employment training (literacy, safety, interview guidance, etc.). Addressing these barriers would require multiple interventions delivered over an extended period of time.

Poor employer perceptions, including discrimination, misinformation, cultural misunderstandings, and other related workplace issues specifically in the context of hiring Aboriginal peoples still persist among some employers. According to agreement holders, employers can be unwilling to commit to providing work experience to clients if they are unfamiliar with the qualification of First Nations peoples and/or have negative perceptions as to their suitability as workers. Such perceptions can be difficult to overcome, as some employers may be reluctant to become informed.

Participants at our policy conference were deeply concerned about the ongoing policy challenges in reform of Indigenous education and training. Broadly speaking, the slow pace of education and training reforms in British Columbia to eliminate the educational gap in graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, highlights the chronic discrimination and disadvantage anchored in the system.

Participants were concerned about the existence of the ‘racism of low expectations’ when it comes to Indigenous students, as well as the ongoing discrimination, misinformation and cultural misunderstandings facing Indigenous students in British Columbia’s workplaces. Youth participants expressed willingness to make a positive contribution to the province’s education and training policies and programs, as well as laws and rules that govern operation of the education system.





## Recommendations

- Federal and provincial **governments must acknowledge that education is a core area** in the exercise of urban Indigenous self-government;
- **Indigenous youth want greater attention to reducing barriers to employment**, including implementation of mentoring programs and working with employers to build supportive environments;
- Youth participants called for **mandatory inclusion of Indigenous history, culture, language and traditions into school curriculums**;
- **Indigenous languages and cultures must be key components to educational programs** to achieve systemic change and meet the needs of Indigenous learners;
- Youth want **support for place-based education that deals with the colonialism that remains hidden in the education system** and which perpetuates misunderstandings and social injustices towards Indigenous peoples;
- **Increase supports for youth ‘aging out’ of the child welfare system**, including opportunities for education and training, access to safe and affordable housing and related health supports;
- Increased efforts are needed to **attract and retain Indigenous teachers to schools** in East Vancouver;
- **Increase Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth involvement in all aspects of school life** including representation on school boards and committees;
- **Increase Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth participation in education design, implementation and administration**;
- **Increase Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth involvement in education and training policies and programs**, as well as laws and rules that govern the delivery of the education system in British Columbia;
- **Launch a comprehensive strategy and action plan to battle racism and discrimination** in British Columbia’s education and training systems.



## MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

**THE KEY MESSAGE WE'LL TAKE FROM THE MMIWG BREAKOUT SESSION IS THAT WE WON'T FORGET ABOUT THE ISSUES AND WE'LL WORK TO SEE WIDESPREAD CHANGE**

-Youth Participant

**LIVING IN EAST VAN MEANS THAT INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS HAVE A MUCH BIGGER CHANCE OF BEING MURDERED THAN ANY OTHER WOMEN OR GIRLS IN CANADA**


-Youth Participant

### CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT

In 2016, the federal government launched the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). The Inquiry's mandate involved looking into and reporting on the systemic causes of all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls, including sexual violence. In addition, the National Inquiry was to examine the underlying social, economic, cultural, institutional and historical causes that contribute to the ongoing violence and the particular vulnerabilities of Indigenous women and girls. The mandate involved looking into and reporting on existing institutional policies and practices to address violence with special attention to those that are effective in reducing violence and increasing safety.

The commission looked at a broad range of issues concerning policing, child welfare practices, health, education and the justice and public safety sectors. On June 3, 2019, the 1200 page final report entitled *Reclaiming Power and Place: the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* was released. It contained 231 Calls for Justice regarding human rights, culture, health service providers, human security, justice, media, transportation and hospitality services, law enforcement agencies, the legal community, educators, social workers, resource extraction industries, the Correctional Service of Canada and Canadians in general.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth from East Vancouver chose to discuss and reflect on the 200 recommendations that were made in the report entitled *Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*, because this report was based on the lived experiences, leadership and expertise of Indigenous survivors from our region. This report was released on April 3, 2019, which was two months prior to release of the report of the National Inquiry.



In the time available at the conference, participants were introduced to the complex issues of violence, colonialism, genocide, Indigenous rights, violations of rights, including those to rights, culture, health, security and justice. Through dialogue, conversation and debate, youth participants were able to have an overview of the work completed and the many Calls to Action that had been drafted by the National Inquiry. Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth focussed on the ideas and recommendations made in the *Red Women Rising* report, since they flowed through the same lived experiences as many of the youth participants.

Youth participants spoke about the great number of studies and reports that had been undertaken in East Vancouver and how most of them were now collecting dust on a shelf in some government office. This fear highlighted the importance of sustaining youth activism and finally ending the four pathways that maintain colonial violence: 1) historical, multigenerational and intergenerational trauma; 2) social and economic marginalization; 3) maintaining the status quo and institutional lack of will; and 4) ignoring the agency and expertise of Indigenous women and girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people.<sup>14</sup>

Youth participants spoke about the strength and resilience of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in East Vancouver and their important role in continued activism, building successful models of community development and ending the genocide that is being carried out against Indigenous peoples. Empowerment of youth voices was seen as vital to supporting those Indigenous women and girls who want to change existing policies and practices and reduce violence. Participants saw robust youth engagement located within overarching social, political, economic and cultural issues where effective actions could take place.

Dismantling colonialism in Canadian society, including its entrenched governance and institutions, is a large and complex task. Youth participants spoke about an incremental approach, which could ultimately lead to changes in policies, laws and regulations, which in turn could produce systemic changes. Article 2 of UNDRIP sets out such a vision of a new society where “Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular those based on their indigenous origin or identity.”

Empowerment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth to deal with the wave of challenges involved with the Calls to Action from the National Inquiry is critical to successful outcomes in future policies, services and programs. Participants now have a deeper appreciation and awareness of how the rights of Indigenous women and girls have been violated through existing institutional policies and practices. The following international conventions have all been violated:

- United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- United Nations Convention on Civil and Political Rights;
- United Nations Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide; and
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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14 Red Women Rising Report Summary



Youth participants recognized the importance of British Columbia adopting and implementing UNDRIP, as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. They saw it as a burst of hope that the forces of colonial domination, dispossession and disempowerment could finally be reversed.



## Recommendations

- **Ensure that youth are full-fledged participants in the National Action Plan** to address violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people;
- **Develop and implement awareness and education programs for youth concerning sexual exploitation and human trafficking** in British Columbia;
- **Ensure that schools and teachers in East Vancouver are aware of and utilizing Their Voices will Guide Us**, an educational initiative of the National Inquiry directed at students and teachers;
- **Ensure that schools and teachers in East Vancouver support deeper, long-term engagement and educational measures to raise awareness and change attitudes** as part of violence prevention against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people;
- **Increase supports and capacity for Indigenous youth to participate in the reform of policies, laws and regulations** with respect to youth 'aging out' of the child welfare system;
- **Develop community engagement protocols** with the participation of Indigenous youth to ensure that culturally sensitive policies, programs and services are used by police and officials working on justice issues;
- **Ensure that police and criminal justice officials participate in cultural competency training** which includes the participation of Indigenous youth;
- **Design and implement awareness-raising campaigns and programs** for Indigenous communities concerning violence prevention and combating lateral violence;
- **Provide funding and support for increased awareness** of 2SLGBTQQIA issues, and implement programs, services and supports for 2SLGBTQQIA people;
- **Increase programs and services for vulnerable Indigenous youth and their families**, including access to traditional healing programs and family violence prevention;
- **Ensure that the children of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls have access to ongoing economic security and social and health services**, including mental health counselling.

## ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

**BUILD MORE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES THAT INCLUDE  
COMMUNITY GARDENS, HOUSES THAT ARE ENERGY EFFICIENT AND  
INCLUDE LOTS OF GREEN SPACE FOR PARKS AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES**

*-Youth Participant*

**END DESTRUCTIVE PROJECTS SUCH AS THE TMX PIPELINE  
WHICH THREATENS OUR LANDS AND WATERS**

*-Youth Participant*

### CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change provides a definition of the term “climate change”:

2. “Climate Change” means a change in climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.<sup>15</sup>

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the world’s largest conservation network, has made a strong and clear statement on the impact climate change will have on Indigenous peoples:

“.... indigenous and traditional peoples are going to be particularly burdened by the costs of climate change impacts and show evidence that the dangers of climate change are already threatening traditional cultures. The degree of vulnerability varies from one group to another and can be unevenly distributed across and within communities.”<sup>16</sup>

There was a strong commitment from our youth participants concerning the need to address climate change and the environment and how we can protect the land and waters for generations to come. Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in East Vancouver view climate change as a global crises and a major threat to Mother Earth. Indigenous youth understand and support the collective efforts of Indigenous peoples around the planet to heal the relationship between humans and Mother Earth and support the survival of all peoples. Collectively, youth participants recognized that climate change is having adverse impacts on our cultures, human

<sup>15</sup> <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf> (accessed May 11, 2020)

<sup>16</sup> Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Climate Change Issues Paper. International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Mirjam Macchi Contributing authors: Gonzalo Oviedo, Sarah Gotheil, Katharine Cross, Agni Boedhihartono, Caterina Wolfangel, Matthew Howell. (2008) p 57.





and environmental health, human rights, well-being and food systems and that concrete actions are urgently required by governments and individuals to protect and preserve the environment.

Indigenous youth support the view that the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* should serve as the framework for all processes related to climate change at the local, regional, national and global levels. The importance of Indigenous traditional knowledge has not been fully recognized in respect to climate change and Indigenous youth from East Vancouver are calling for:

- Full respect for Indigenous rights, including those contained in UNDRIP;
- Respect for the Indigenous right to free, prior and informed consent in all climate change programs and activities;
- Recognition and protection of Indigenous traditional knowledge in all mitigation and adaptation measures; and,
- Full and effective participation of Indigenous youth in all processes, mechanisms and bodies relating to climate change.

Youth from East Vancouver want to band together to demand more concrete action to slow up climate change. While all participants were aware of the impact climate change is having on Indigenous peoples, the contributions that Indigenous peoples can make in the fight to slow climate change are often overlooked. Mitigation of climate change is a collective effort and Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth from East Vancouver want to be integrated into climate change strategies and action plans being implemented by all levels of government.

Youth from East Vancouver stand in solidarity with youth from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of North Dakota who continue to oppose the construction of a pipeline through their sacred territory. The future of this controversial pipeline is in question because the US courts struck down the permits and ordered an environmental review. The Trans Mountain pipeline is also opposed by youth from East Vancouver, since it will be a major contributor to climate change by promoting fossil fuel consumption as well as posing a major threat to the environment. Youth are deeply concerned about the climate-related impacts that will result from the Trans Mountain Pipeline project and associated tanker expansion.

Indigenous science is closely tied to nature and is holistic using spiritual processes to bring together information from mental, physical, social and cultural areas. It is firmly rooted on the principle of looking ahead seven generations when making decisions. Traditional environmental knowledge is the result of observation over a long period of time. One of the fundamental

differences between Indigenous science and western-based science is connection to the land. For Indigenous peoples, land is a holistic, interconnected system where all parts play an important role and ultimately in the survival of the people.

Youth participants in East Vancouver expressed a strong interest in environmental knowledge, ecological thought and conservation-related behaviour. The root issues of power, equality and respect are involved and must be addressed in order to have the meaningful involvement of all youth in environmental issues. Indigenous youth raised concerns about the lack of equality between Indigenous and western science knowledge systems. Participants in our policy conference warned about the token involvement of youth in environmental processes, in addition to the lack of funding to support environmental education that is based on Indigenous knowledge systems.

Indigenous youth have a vital role to play in environmental management and the development and strengthening of this role is an important responsibility for all jurisdictions. The Indigenous environmental viewpoint is based on a deep understanding of the environment and our relationship with the land and water. Traditionally this knowledge was handed down within our communities and shared, but in the modern urban context, new methodologies need to be developed. Youth participants acknowledged the need to document and preserve the environmental knowledge that is held by Elders and knowledge holders. Conference participants spoke about the loss of traditional knowledge holders as potentially ending an entire knowledge system.



## Recommendations

- **Promote urban environmental education** for East Vancouver youth where they can develop the skills of direct stewardship action as well as policy advocacy;
- **Climate change and environmental initiatives must be informed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth** and be framed as a process of truth and reconciliation;
- **Environmental education for East Vancouver youth must take place in the context of the ethnic diversity in the area** and promote environmental and social justice;
- **Amplifying Indigenous youth voices** is essential to climate change and environmental initiatives;
- **Local environmental initiatives and programs** must increase the participation of youth from East Vancouver;
- **Encourage the development of programs and initiatives that support education on traditional knowledge;**
- **Support implementation of a Mother Earth mentoring program** for urban Indigenous youth;
- **Support local Indigenous knowledge keepers** in cultivating relationships with youth and providing opportunities for sharing traditional knowledge and stories of the land;
- **Assist youth in adopting methods to contribute to environmental care and protection**, as well as mobilizing support on social media and other online platforms;
- **Cultivate youth involvement in environmental stewardship using place-based and action-orientated practices** such as community gardens and other opportunities where everyone works together.



## HOUSING

**INDIGENOUS YOUTH ARE OVERREPRESENTED IN THE YOUTH HOMELESS POPULATION IN EAST VANCOUVER AND THEY ENCOUNTER MANY BARRIERS WITH HOUSING SERVICES**

-Youth Participant


**GENTRIFICATION OF EAST VANCOUVER IS MAKING IT EVEN HARDER TO FIND SAFE AND AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING**

-Youth Participant

## CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT

Article 25 of UNDRIP states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family including food, clothing, housing and medical care. In Canada, housing for Indigenous peoples is a federal responsibility, which flows from the special relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples through section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*. In *Daniels v. Canada*, the Supreme Court of Canada held that Métis and non-Status Indians are “Indians” under 91(24) and therefore part of the federal responsibility. This ended the jurisdictional debate concerning which order of government was responsible for Métis and non-Status Indians.





Housing policy for Indigenous peoples was recognized by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples as a “tough challenge”. This view was highlighted In October 2019, when Leilani Farha, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, presented her report to the United Nations General Assembly. She listed some of the complex subject areas associated with the Indigenous right to housing:

“[it] must therefore integrate the right to self-determination, the principle of free, prior and informed consent, the right to land, territories and resources and access to justice.”<sup>17</sup>

On June 21, 2019, the *National Housing Strategy Act* received Royal Assent and became law. Under this historic legislation, Canada recognizes housing as a fundamental human right. The legislation includes the following Housing Policy Declaration:

It is declared to be the housing policy of the Government of Canada to:

- recognize that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law;
- recognize that housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities;
- support improved housing outcomes for the people of Canada; and
- further the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.<sup>18</sup>

In November 2017, the federal government announced its first ever National Housing Strategy. Its purpose is to set up a new roadmap for federal housing policy, require the federal government to develop and maintain a NHS aimed at those in greatest need, create new accountability mechanisms that can investigate systemic barriers to accessing housing, and measure and publicly report on indicators related to the NHS.

Unfortunately, the NHS committed the federal government to developing a “distinctions-based ” Indigenous housing strategy:

The National Housing Strategy also respects the Government of Canada’s commitment to a nation-to-nation, Inuit-to-Crown, government-to-government relationship with Indigenous peoples. That is why the National Housing Strategy commits the Government of Canada to fund and continue the significant work currently underway to co-develop distinctions-based housing strategies for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation partners.<sup>19</sup>

The federal government’s focus on a “distinctions-based approach” does not reflect the reality that the majority of Indigenous peoples now live off reserve – in British Columbia, 78% of Indigenous peoples live off reserve.<sup>20</sup> Many Indigenous housing service providers have raised objections to this approach, because it will not meet the needs of their communities. In addition, the “distinctions-based” funding is in reality a euphemism for discrimination against non-Status Indians and Métis who are not interested in joining a council belonging


17 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. The right to adequate housing for Indigenous peoples. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/AdequateHousingIndigenous-Peoples.aspx>

18 National Housing Strategy Act (S.C. 2019, c. 29, s. 313)

19 Canada’s National Housing Strategy, A place to call home, p.4. <https://www.placetocallhome.ca/> (accessed April 3, 2020)

20 Statistics Canada, “Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Key Results from the 2016 Census”, The Daily, 25 Oct. 2017.





to the Métis National Council. Many Status Indians living off reserve continue to experience underservicing, neglect and outright discrimination by *Indian Act* bands.

According to the February 2020 BC Housing Service Plan, the following are Key Strategies:

- Continue to deliver *Building BC* housing programs through partnerships with non-profit, co-operative, community and Indigenous organizations. This involves progressing initiated projects through development and construction phases, completing projects and issuing new project proposals;
- Respond to and prevent homelessness by: 1) implementing emergency shelter and supportive housing options; 2) collaborating with provincial ministries to deliver the Homelessness Action Plan, including implementing the 2020 Report on Homeless Counts in B.C.; and 3) continuing to identify youth and indigenous peoples as a key target groups for program innovation and enhancement.
- Facilitate community dialogue and engagement to help advance social housing projects supported by integrated research and engagement strategies.
- Develop a new housing benefit program as part of the federal-provincial National Housing Strategy agreement.<sup>21</sup>

## Youth Homelessness

In 2012, weaknesses in Vancouver's youth-homelessness approach were identified by the School of Public Policy for BC Housing at Simon Fraser University. The seven weaknesses identified were: 1) service fragmentation; 2) inadequate transition services; 3) general lack of youth specific services and housing; 4) inflexibility; 5) inconsistency in services due to unreliable funding; 6) treating youth as a homogeneous population with a one-size-fits-all policy; and 7) lack of services dedicated to dealing with unique aspects of overrepresented demographics.<sup>22</sup>

The need for a strategy for youth homelessness is based on the understanding that causes are very different than for the adult homeless population. The reasons for youth homelessness basically fall into three categories: 1) family problems; 2) economic problems; 3) residential Instability.<sup>23</sup>

Through discussion and dialogue, our youth participants were able to identify issues and potential concerns about housing and homelessness in East Vancouver. Significant challenges for Indigenous youth exist in the region aggravated by entrenched post-colonial structures and attitudes, which result in political, administrative and legal delays. As long as these structures remain in place, progress on housing and homelessness issues will continue to be undermined.

During our policy conference, youth cited racism, high rents, low incomes, unsafe shared housing and a lack of social housing as barriers to independent living. The ongoing decrease in rental affordability and a decline in the availability of social housing have resulted in rising youth homelessness in East Vancouver. Housing is key to meeting the physical, social, cultural and economic needs of youth; however, youth are a high-risk group for homelessness. Lower incomes and lower labour force participation among youth were cited as key factors in their inability to secure affordable, safe and sound housing.

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21 Government of British Columbia. 2020/21 - 2021/22 *Service Plan*, BC Housing, p.8.

22 Sandip Basi, et al, *Housing Homeless Youth in Vancouver: Key Barriers and Strategic Responses*. (2012) p.19.

23 *ibid.* p.7.

On housing, the following concerns and issues were selected by conference participants as major challenges for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth living in East Vancouver:

- Lack of safe, affordable rental units;
- Discrimination/Racism;
- Lack of economic opportunities (full time jobs with a living wage);
- Lack of adequate social housing;
- Drug/alcohol addictions; and,
- Mental illness/disabilities.



## Recommendations

- Urban Indigenous youth are **calling on the federal government to carry out its fiduciary responsibilities** under s. 91(24) and provide safe and affordable housing for Indigenous peoples living off reserve;
- **Canada's National Housing Strategy must include a continuum of housing for street-involved Indigenous youth** including: youth shelters, transitional housing, co-op housing, safe and affordable housing as well as supportive housing for youth leaving child protection, foster care and group homes;
- **Housing strategies and action plans must clearly identify Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth** as target groups for meaningful engagement and program innovation and enhancement;
- **BC Housing needs to support the capacity of ALIVE** starting with an Indigenous partnership and relationship memorandum;
- **Housing must be a means to achieve stability and security** for youth living in East Vancouver;
- **A range of housing options** such as supportive housing, transitional housing and affordable coop housing should be made available to youth who are transitioning to adulthood;
- Effective housing solutions for Indigenous youth must **include their involvement in policy program design and delivery**;
- **Early and effective training and guidance funding needs to be provided to ALIVE** to ensure that Indigenous youth living in East Vancouver are able to raise issues and concerns about affordable and supportive housing;
- **Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation should set up a mentoring support program** in housing for Indigenous youth with dedicated training funds and access to wage supports;
- **Ensure that Indigenous youth who transition from care are provided with housing options and supports** to enable them to fully transition to adulthood in a safe and planned way;
- **Housing programs must include youth with disabilities** who are particularly vulnerable to the crises in housing and homelessness.



## POVERTY REDUCTION

“MY FAMILY IS OVERWHELMED BY THE COST OF LIVING IN VANCOUVER. EVERYTHING IS SO EXPENSIVE AND WE’RE MAKING ENDS MEET BUT JUST BARELY

-Youth Participant

“VANCOUVER IS AN IMPOSSIBLE PLACE FOR YOUTH TO SURVIVE IN BECAUSE THE COST OF LIVING IS SKY HIGH AND UNLESS YOU LAND A REALLY GOOD JOB YOU’RE GOING TO STRUGGLE

-Youth Participant

## CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT

*UNDRIP Article 21: Equal Access to Economic Opportunity*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

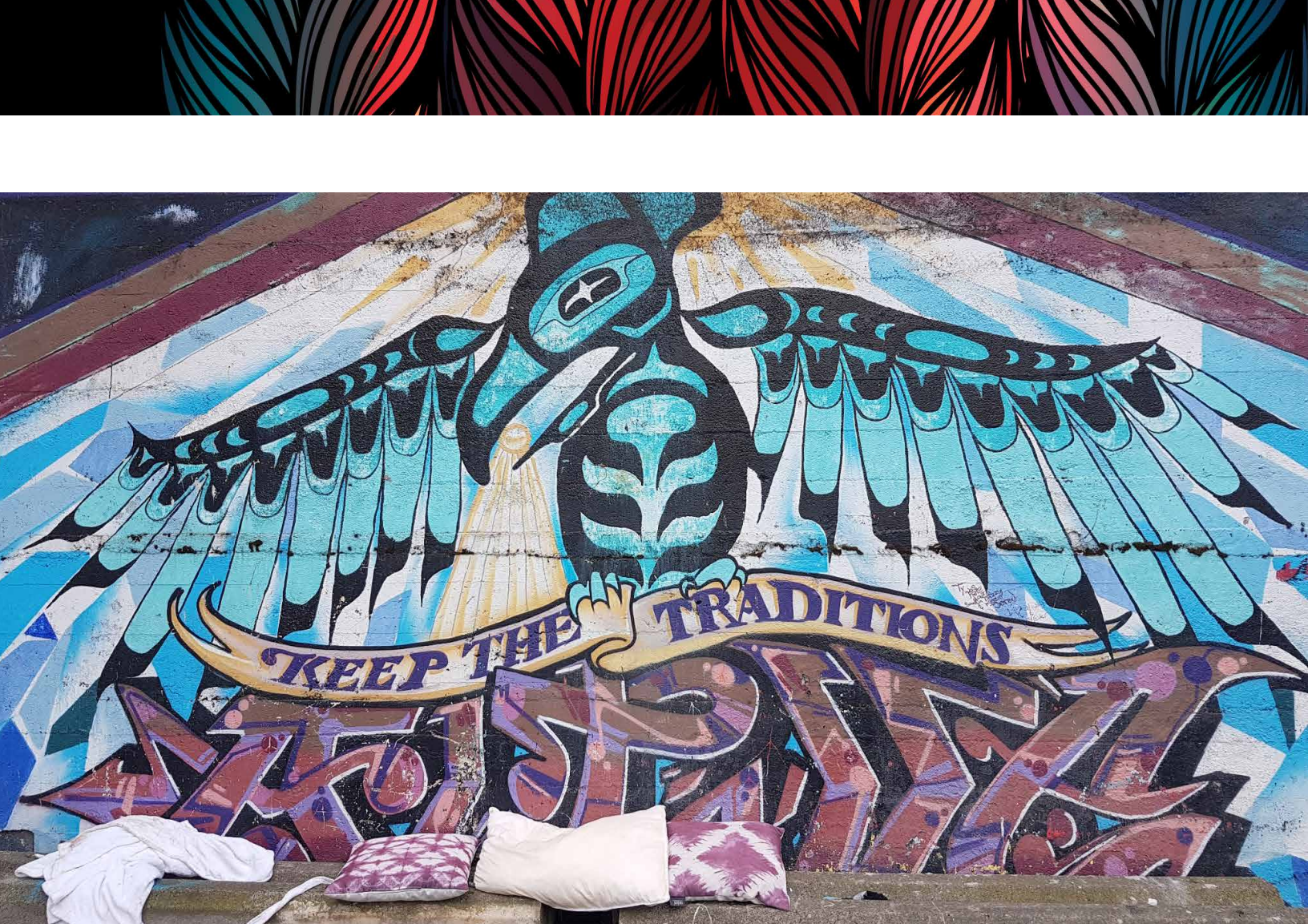
The issue of poverty and urban Indigenous youth is extensive and the intention of our conference break out table was to provide an overview of the complexity of the issues and dialogue about particular challenges. The spirit and intent of UNDRIP is the principled framework for our work on poverty reduction and is best described by Special Rapporteur James Anaya:

[It] represents an authoritative common understanding, at the global level, of the **minimum content** (emphasis added) of the rights of Indigenous peoples, upon a foundation of various sources in international human rights law.<sup>24</sup>

On August 21, 2018, in Vancouver, the federal government released its *Opportunity for All: Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy*, which is based on “...a vision of a Canada without poverty, and on the principle that all Canadians deserve a fair and real chance to succeed and live with dignity; the strategy commits to strengthening the middle class and helping those who are working hard to join it.”

<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples*, S. James Anaya, UN Doc. A/HRC/9/9 (11 August 2008) at para. 85 (Conclusions).





The three pillars of the strategy are:

- 1) Dignity: Lifting Canadians out of poverty by ensuring basic needs – such as safe and affordable housing, healthy food, and healthcare – are met;
- 2) Opportunity and Inclusion: Helping Canadians join the middle class by promoting full participation in society and equality of opportunity;
- 3) Resilience and Security: Supporting the middle class by protecting Canadians from falling into poverty and by supporting income security and resilience.<sup>25</sup>

In the federal poverty reduction strategy, poverty is defined as:

The condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society.<sup>26</sup>

As part of the federal strategy, Statistics Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada have set up a new method to measure poverty called the Market Basket Measure (MBM). This new poverty line looks at the cost of a basket of goods and services needed to cover

25 Employment and Social Development Canada. Opportunity for All: Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy. August 21, 2018. (<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/reports/strategy.html>). (accessed April 3, 2020)

26 Ibid. p.7.



the necessities of life and achieve a modest standard of living. The MBM is important to any discussion concerning poverty in Canada, since it's now entrenched in the *Poverty Reduction Act*, which received Royal Assent in June 2019.

According to the chart below, the amounts would be the minimum a person or family would need to earn in Vancouver in order to afford a list of goods and services needed to reach a basic standard of living:

**Market Basket Measure (MBM) thresholds for economic families and persons not in economic families, 2015<sup>27</sup>**

Persons not in economic families	2 persons family	3 persons family	4 persons family	5 persons family
19,976	28,250	34,599	39,951	44,667

The Government of Canada has made a clear commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and to a renewed relationship. Unfortunately, the federal poverty reduction strategy calls for a “distinctions-based approach.” It states:


The Government will continue to work in partnership with Indigenous organizations to realize a Canada where we have achieved meaningful reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis. As part of *Opportunity for All*, this will mean recognizing the unique understanding and experience of poverty amongst Indigenous peoples, supporting autonomy and empowerment, and building on investments to date that take a distinctions-based approach, where programming is designed with and for Indigenous peoples.<sup>28</sup>

The “distinctions-based” approach is anchored on the idea that specific First Nation, Métis or Inuit policies are necessitated to deal with the barriers and challenges involved with Indigenous poverty reduction. This approach means that the only Indigenous organizations meaningfully involved in policy and actions are the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. This “distinctions-based” approach is flawed, because these organizations do not represent or serve all Indigenous peoples in Canada and don’t claim to do so. With many Indigenous peoples living away from their home communities, the “distinctions-based” approach does not provide them Indigenous-specific services and interventions for poverty reduction. Most importantly, the approach is inconsistent with the federal government’s obligations under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, its fiduciary relationship with all Indigenous peoples in Canada, and its jurisdictional responsibilities under s.91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

The final report of the External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities entitled *From Restless Communities to Resilient Places* (2006) remains an important policy document for ALIVE. In 2004, this advisory committee was established by the federal government under the chairmanship of Michael Harcourt, former mayor of Vancouver and former premier of British

27 Statistics Canada, Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016, Table 4.5, Market Basket Measure (MBM) thresholds for economic families and persons not in economic families, 2015. ([https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/tab/t4\\_5-eng.cfm](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/tab/t4_5-eng.cfm)) (accessed April 14, 2020)

28 Employment and Social Development Canada. *Opportunity for All: Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy*. August 2018. (<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/reports/strategy.html>) (accessed April 28, 2020)



Columbia. Recommendation 1 in this report emphasized the importance of a place-based approach to policy making:

The Committee therefore recommends that all governments in Canada adopt a **place-based approach to policy making** (emphasis added), which will allow them to foster a better capacities to understand, develop and manage Canada's places for the future. Specifically, the Committee recommends that the leadership role of the federal government be one of facilitation and partnership with other orders of government and civil society, to deliver locally appropriate solutions to issues of national consequence playing out at a local level.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, when the report was released, the Harper government was in power and not interested in acting on the recommendations. Many of the principles and actions recommended in the report are the same as those that ALIVE has set for itself as part of our *Collective Impact Based Strategy*. Our strategy looks at how we can work effectively through various processes from pre-natal to Elder care and to enhance Indigenous engagement in existing publicly funded institutions. Collective impact (CI) is defined as:

Initiatives that depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring that all participants do the same thing, but by encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.<sup>30</sup> Successful CI initiatives have five conditions that lead to strong results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually supportive reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.<sup>31</sup>



29 Mike Harcourt, "From Restless Communities to Resilient Places: Building a Stronger Future for All Canadians", External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities (2006) p.18. ([https://ccednetrcdec.ca/sites/ccednercdec.ca/files/munities\\_to\\_resilient\\_places\\_mike\\_harcourt\\_0.pdf](https://ccednetrcdec.ca/sites/ccednercdec.ca/files/munities_to_resilient_places_mike_harcourt_0.pdf) (accessed April 28, 2020))

30 John Kania and Mark Kramer. Collective Impact. Stanford Social Innovation Review. 2011. [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact) (accessed April 7, 2020)

31 Ibid.





## Recommendations

- **The minimum standards affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are universal in nature and must be an integral part of poverty reduction strategies** and actions taking place in East Vancouver;
- **Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in East Vancouver are the backbone of support** for a collective impact initiative leading to systemic change;
- **The federal government must articulate poverty reduction strategies and action plans that are inclusive of all Indigenous peoples;**
- **Implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action must be a priority** for all jurisdictions;
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth must have the **capacity to build networks for action, knowledge-sharing** and methods to facilitate the flow of information;
- **Increase opportunities and reduce barriers for vulnerable youth** by ensuring that federal and provincial policies and programs reflect the specific needs of youth who are at risk of poverty;
- **Increase private sector employment and mentorship opportunities** for youth in East Vancouver by increasing collaboration and taking action locally;
- Strengthen the role and capacity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in **the formulation, implementation and monitoring of federal and provincial policies in areas that most affect youth;**
- **Increase youth participation in governance, accountability and public policy processes;**
- **Expand post-secondary education program options** under BC's single parent employment initiative;
- **Ensure that youth aging out of care have necessary financial supports** for basic living costs and basic supports and services until they are 25;
- **Expand health care coverage** to include prescription drugs, counselling, dental and optical care;
- **Support pilot projects for the employment of youth with disabilities** and ensure they are part of poverty reduction strategies and action plans;
- **Increase access to education and skills training** programs targeted on youth;
- **Support youth job creation** through infrastructure spending and emphasize apprenticeships and meaningful jobs that lead to opportunities for advancement;
- Ensure that vulnerable families and single parents in East Vancouver have **access to fully subsidized child care;**
- **Reduce tuition fees and increase availability of bursaries and grants** for post secondary education and training;
- **Increase the supply of affordable, safe housing** in East Vancouver that is youth focussed;
- **Include long-term commitments** by participating jurisdictions in all poverty reduction strategies and action plans.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS



**WE NEED BETTER ACCESS TO EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES  
INCLUDING TEAM-BASED ACTIVITIES**

*-Youth Participant*



**YOUTH NEED BETTER MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES THAT  
REFLECT INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND CONNECTION  
TO FAMILY AND THE COMMUNITY**

*-Youth Participant*



**WE NEED TO RESPECT AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF  
PEOPLE LIVING WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

*-Youth Participant*

## CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT


Article 23 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

The health of Indigenous peoples has been widely recognized as the most urgent issue in Canada.<sup>32</sup> Indigenous families in East Vancouver face serious challenges involving high rates of poverty, food insecurity, poor housing conditions, addictions, low education outcomes, poor health and a high risk of being victimized by crime. While some Indigenous people have made progress, health and social issues remain major concerns for urban Indigenous youth, since the bulk of federal funding for programs and services goes to reserves. Federal policy makers have failed to adjust to the new reality where the majority of Indigenous peoples now live off reserve

32 André Picard. "Canada has the least universal among universal health care programs: André Picard". Chatelaine Magazine. May 2017.





and in urban communities. The federal approach is a continuation of the Crown's colonial strategy to divide Indigenous peoples on and off reserve against each other, when collective efforts would clearly be a beneficial and powerful force.

Prior to *Daniels v. Canada* (Indian Affairs and Northern Development), 2016 SCC 12, the federal government denied that it even had jurisdiction over non-Status Indians and Métis under section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*. This justification was used by the federal government to exclude Métis and non-Status Indians from many federal government programs and benefits including those dealing with health and wellness. The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples said that this denial was “at the core of official federal government discrimination.”<sup>33</sup> Four years after the Supreme Court of Canada rendered the *Daniels* decision, progress in dealing with discrimination in federal policies and services still remains a major barrier to dealing with Indigenous health issues in East Vancouver.

While many organizations have rated Vancouver as the best city in the world to live, the reality for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth who participated in our breakout session is very different. For Indigenous youth, restoring whole health to all Indigenous peoples is closely connected to progress in social, political and economic development. The health gaps separating Indigenous from non-Indigenous youth remain wide and resolution of this core issue is closely linked to the struggle for self-government and self-determination where Indigenous peoples would govern internal affairs including health.

Our youth participants all agreed that health should be treated holistically. Only when an individual is physically, mentally and emotionally well and living in a state of balance and harmony, can true progress be made.

Indigenous youth have cited a number of contributing factors to the high suicide rate, including the impact of bullying and cyber bullying, lack of emotional support, lack of physical safety, lack of activities and its impact on emotional and mental wellness, and the impact of substance use.<sup>34</sup> Other known contributing factors to the disproportionately high rates of suicide experienced by Indigenous youth in Canada versus non-Indigenous youth include all forms of racism, intergenerational trauma, access to healthcare services, the historical and ongoing child welfare crisis for Indigenous children, a history (and ongoing experience of) colonialism and other social determinants of health.<sup>35</sup>

Youth participants spoke to the complex and practical issues involved with mental health, as well as the lack of accessible mental health services in East Vancouver. Prescribing a course of action for this issue is directly related to the failure of the federal government to carry out its responsibilities under section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.


In its final report entitled *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future*, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported on the historical issues that are a major part of the mental health disparities in Indigenous populations. The commission emphasized the importance of ceremonies and practices:

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33 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ministry of Supply and Services. Ottawa. 1996. Vol. IV at 219-20.

34 Giles D. Sask. children's advocate raises alarm bells over Indigenous youth suicide rate. December 5, 2017. <https://globalnews.ca/news/3898080/saskatchewan-childrens-advocate-corey-osoup-indigenous-youth-suicide/> [accessed May 14, 2019].

35 Allan B, Smylie J. First Peoples, second class treatment: the role of racism in the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Toronto, ON: Wellesley Institute; 2015



Ceremonies enable us to set aside, however briefly, our cynicisms, doubts and disbeliefs, even as they console us, educate us and inspire hope. They have an intangible quality that moves us from our heads to our hearts. They teach us about ourselves, our histories and our lives.<sup>36</sup>

Our youth participants are supportive of approaching social and emotional health challenges in a holistic and culturally appropriate manner. This is particularly important, since mental health services are divided up into subcategories of depression, suicide prevention, substance abuse, violence and psychiatric disorders. At the end of the day, a new holistic approach to mental health services for youth would produce improved results. Indigenous youth recognize that the health of an Indigenous person is directly linked to the health of the family, community and nation.

Broadly speaking, Indigenous youth in East Vancouver experience systemic and overt forms of discrimination in mainstream sport and recreation. As a result of these negative experiences, participation in sport and recreation is challenging for many Indigenous youth, even at the high school level. Since most Indigenous youth now live in urban settings, an innovative and constructive approach is needed to increase the number of Indigenous youth who are involved in mainstream sport and recreation activities. Non-Indigenous youth have an important role to play in increasing awareness and appreciation of Indigenous cultures and ending the discrimination and racism that currently exists. Our youth participants are looking for sport and recreation training programs that produce concrete results and promote anti-racism understanding and awareness initiatives.

During our breakout session, Indigenous youth frequently spoke about challenges to their cultural identities, discrimination, racism and difficulty in finding culturally appropriate programs and services. To bring these challenges more sharply into focus is the blunt fact that suicidal behaviour is a major health concern among Indigenous youth. With a suicide mortality rate estimated to be five times higher than for non-Indigenous youth, the time for effective action is overdue. From a practical perspective, Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth from East Vancouver are calling for improvements in mental health supports and youth engagement in strategies and action plans. Indigenous youth are supportive of a holistic and culturally appropriate approach to sport and recreation, where physical, spiritual, mental and cultural activities can work together to develop and maintain optimum personal health and wellness. The idea of a holistic approach for health and wellness is based on traditional Indigenous knowledge.

Problem-specific programs and services need to be part of health and healing systems that address the social, economic and political conditions that lead to health challenges. For Indigenous youth in East Vancouver, the struggle to control health and social services is just one part of the overall struggle for self-government and self-determination. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples called for such a systematic change to deal with the poor outcomes in Indigenous health. While some progress has been made since this landmark report was released, Indigenous youth in East Vancouver still face a lack of culturally appropriate programs and services and a lack of Indigenous service providers who can develop and deliver holistic, community-based services.

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36 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada." Queen's University Press. (2015) p. 102





## Recommendations

- **Implement an enhanced medicare program** that includes universal pharmacare, dental and optical care, counselling and rehabilitation services;
- **Provide healthcare workers with training in cultural competency** that focuses on the historical and contemporary issues faced by Indigenous youth;
- **Advocate for a youth mental health advisory board** to advise the city of Vancouver on matters of youth mental health services;
- **Ensure that mental health services for youth are readily available** in East Vancouver;
- Work with urban Indigenous peoples including youth to **implement Indigenous control over culturally appropriate youth health and wellness services**;
- **Ensure that community-based research is initiated, developed, controlled and carried out by Indigenous people** with the support of youth in East Vancouver;
- **Remove barriers to successful transitions between child, youth, adult and senior mental health services**;
- **Increase mental health initiatives** that promote mental health for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, including prevention efforts for those at high risk;
- **Increase the availability and affordability of family counselling and mediation**, as well as programs and supports concerning parenting and life skills;
- **Build an effective and integrated health and wellness service network** that supports Indigenous youth;
- **Expand access to healthy foods** for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth living in East Vancouver;
- **Ensure that Indigenous youth have access to culturally appropriate health care services** with a focus on gaps that currently exist;
- **Provide cultural competency training for front-line health care providers and administrators** working in East Vancouver;
- **Seek support for traditional medicines and practices**, as well as activities for youth that bridge traditional and contemporary cultures;
- **Protect and promote traditional knowledge beliefs, values, practices, medicines and models of health and healing** into health programs and services that serve Indigenous youth in East Vancouver;
- **Provide a school-based curriculum for youth** on subjects such as mental wellness and education and the importance of a healthy lifestyle and appropriate coping mechanisms;
- **Increase the availability of sports and recreation activities** that are affordable for low income families;
- **Ensure better access to health services for youth who identify as LGBTQQ2S**;
- **Ensure better access to life promotion and crises support programs** that are holistic and culturally sensitive.



**OUR PLACE, OUR HOME, OUR VISION**

**YOUTH VOICES**  
**OF EAST VANCOUVER**

