

NATIONAL GATHERING OF ELDERS

KANATA




NGE 2017 & 2019 Forum Summary
Published April 2020

FOREWORD

National Gathering of Elders Kanata (NGE Kanata) became a federally incorporated not-for-profit in 2017. The organization's vision is "Gathering the First Peoples of Kanata, igniting the spirit of sharing and celebration through the guidance and wisdom of the Elders, walking in harmony and in unity." The mission of NGE Kanata is to create opportunities for bringing diverse First Peoples together through national gatherings. Additionally, it seeks to build and strengthen the gap between First Peoples and non-Indigenous groups and to celebrate and sustain the environment, languages, identities, and cultures.

In September 2017, the first National Gathering of Elders (NGE) was hosted in Edmonton, Alberta. The coordinators anticipated an attendance of 2 500 Elders from across Canada. On the first day of the gathering, an unexpectedly high number of participants arrived, bringing attendance to over 5 000 Elders. The gathering was a historic event, bringing together First Nation, Metis, and Inuit Elders to discuss pertinent issues faced by Indigenous people across Canada. Some of the topics discussed were Reconciliation, Revitalization of Language and Culture, Climate Change, MMIWG, and Elders' Health. The emotions and good intentions of this gathering left Indigenous people with a desire for more collaboration, and to work with each other's commonalities and learn from differences.



National
Gathering of Elders



To continue in the spirit of collaboration and respond to requests from the Elders, the first National Indigenous Cultural Expo (NICE) was developed and implemented in September 2018. The collaborative spirit brought forth a committee of volunteers who coordinated one of the country's largest Indigenous cultural expos in Edmonton, Alberta. The expo featured a Powwow, Metis Festival, Inuit Traditional Showcase, cultural workshops, demonstrations, traditional food sampling, handgames tournament, trade show, and Indigenous Fashion Gala, with attendance of over 7 000 people from all over the world.

Since the conception of NGE Kanata from the first NGE in 2017 and at NICE 2018, the Indigenous Women's Leadership Symposium has been developed and implemented, and NGE 2019 (Winnipeg, Manitoba) was completed successfully. NGE Kanata is currently developing NGE 2021, which will be held in Regina, Saskatchewan, and NICE 2022, to be held in Edmonton, Alberta.

None of these gatherings could have taken place without collaboration, teamwork, and a desire to work from individual Indigenous groups' strengths and learn from each other. The highlights and beauty of Indigenous culture, traditional knowledge, healing qualities, pride, and the aspiration of each Indigenous culture can be seen clearly at NGE Kanata's gatherings. The love, acceptance, and warmth felt at each gathering bring smiles to faces, hugs to those who need them, and a gateway for all who wish to be part of something bigger than themselves.



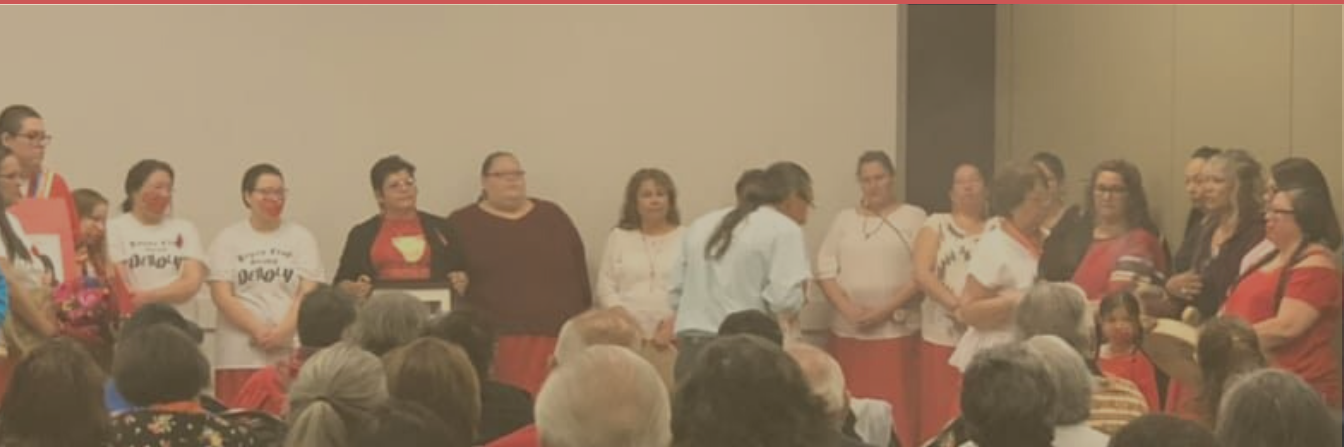
MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN, GIRLS, +

INTRODUCTION

In July 2019, the National Gathering of Elders Kanata invited Elders from across Canada to attend and give recommendations on various issues Indigenous communities face. These pages capture the voices of our Indigenous Elders on how to use local organizations and activists to end the violence against women, men, girls, and boys; how to empower our women and girls to value their voices and speak up for themselves; and how to ensure the RCMP and police services look after the best interests of our vulnerable women, men, girls, and boys.

FOR ELDERS FROM ELDERS

Our Elders have spoken and voiced their concerns. They want to get to the root of why women and girls have going missing. Their recommendations to other Elders are: As Elders, we need to talk with our families about what we have experienced. By speaking of traumatic experiences, we can find healing. As Elders, we need to heal ourselves first in order to heal the young. We must return to our traditions and cultures, and pick medicines so we will be able to lead the children. We have to come together, to work together, to love who we are, and to forgive ourselves in order to find peace, and healing. We need to teach the young that “drugs and alcohol are like a bear trap.” We need to teach them to stay away from drugs and alcohol because they keep us from seeing the negative consequences they have on our lives. We need to teach the young about history from our perspective and the importance of treaties.





FOR ORGANIZATIONS FROM ELDERS

The Elders said “the woman is the heartbeat of the nation,” and solutions to the MMIWG+ crisis need to be implemented by organizations in our communities. Their recommendations to local organizations are: Using local organizations, we need to implement our own search teams and task forces when women and girls go missing. We cannot rely on the police, so “when the tracks are fresh, start looking!” Local organizations should also establish driving courses for women and girls. Implementing this will reduce the number of girls who walk or take taxis in cities. We need to teach women and girls always to be vigilant. When getting in a taxi, they should always text or call others to let them know. Similar to our relatives in British Columbia, we need to create a bus/shuttle system run by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people, to go into cities. Additionally, local organizations should teach settlers about Indigenous cultures, traditions, and treaties.

FOR POLICE & RCMP FROM ELDERS

The overarching message that was heard from the voices of the many Elders who spoke of their personal experiences of losing loved ones was that police need to provide more support and effort when families report their loved ones missing. Some of the recommendations that were brought forward are: Police need to do proper investigations into missing or murdered Indigenous women, men, boys, and girls. Both the RCMP and police services must handle missing persons reports effectively and in a serious manner. Cultural and awareness training should be provided for all levels of both the RCMP and the police services. Police must respect and demonstrate compassion toward families and MMIWG+. Police need to be more engaged with the families of victims and provide more meaningful support without bias or discrimination. The RCMP and police need to end racism and prejudice within detachments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Police and government involvement need to improve. The way investigations are being conducted needs to change; more police involvement is required. Speak out against prejudice from police and government institutions. MMIWG+ should be discussed at meetings to prevent this crisis from continuing. Control how the media portrays Indigenous people. Address the ways the justice system convicts people who harm the well-being of Indigenous people. The government is playing tricks and not honouring treaties.
- We need to get to the root of the problem. We need to stay away from drugs and alcohol. "Alcohol and drugs are like a bear trap."
- We need to heal and return to our traditions and cultures so that we can lead the children. We have to come together and work together, and love who we are and forgive ourselves to find peace. We need to pick medicines. Elders need to start talking about what they have gone through in order to heal.
- We must implement our own search organizations/task forces when girls and women go missing. "When the tracks are fresh, start looking." We need to implement a driving course for Indigenous women so that they will not need to walk or take taxis in cities. An Indigenous bus/shuttle system should be established to transport Indigenous people within cities; BC has implemented this already.
- Respect women. Respect Elders. Support women who do walks and searches. The woman is the heartbeat of the nation.
- We need to teach our children how to be vigilant. If they get into a taxi, they should text or call someone. We need to speak our languages, the language of this land, and they need to be taught to the children. We need to teach children about treaties, and to listen to Elders.
- We must teach settlers about Indigenous culture, traditions, and treaties.
- We should establish a 24/7 phone line to give emotional support to the families of MMIWG+.

ELDERS & CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

ELDERS AND CARING FOR THE CAREGIVERS

Many speakers addressed the lasting trauma caused by residential schools and the 60s scoop, which resulted in lost contact with families and disconnection from cultures and communities. Healing of past traumas is only possible with a reconnection to spirituality and by incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the Child Welfare System (CWS).

RECLAIMING THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

We need to incorporate and pass down knowledge into the CWS. Band councils need the power to create and mandate laws regarding child welfare in their own communities. We need to strive toward something collectively to create our own laws, to change the system, and to develop something through communication. It is not enough to call on governments, chiefs, leaders, and politicians; we cannot rely on them to protect our children.

IMPORTANCE OF ELDERS AND COMMUNITIES AND OF KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

Grandparents or Elders play an important role in helping children connect with their cultures and traditional teachings. Elders can also advise those in power. We need to return to these old ways of parenting, with Elders providing guidance and the community supporting parents. The old ways emphasize the importance of the family system and Elders' knowledge. Once, everyone lived in close proximity to each other, and when someone needed something everyone came together and helped. It takes a village to raise a child. Children belong





with their families, not non-Aboriginal families. Children need to know who they are, where they come from, and their history on the land.

REMOVE SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Elders are the keepers of knowledge and of culture. CWS needs to collaborate with Elders as well as remove barriers that prevent them from getting custody of their grandchildren. Elders are the carriers of life and cultural experience that need to be passed down. Taking children out of their homes does not allow for individual and communal healing; it only furthers the cycle of hurt. How can parents truly heal if we take away their purpose in life? We need to work to keep our families together while providing healing for those who need it.

TRANSITIONING OUT

CWS needs to work on programs for those children who “age out,” as well as for those struggling with addiction or abuse. Often, when children are of age, they are tossed on the street without proper knowledge of how to survive as adults. More transitional programs are needed to offer support until children are ready to live on their own. Ceremonies should be incorporated into the aging-out process to solidify that sense of community.

"Children are the spirit of the community, spirit of the home, they are that fire that keeps our lives going... As long as you have the children in your life, you will always have purpose for life."

CLIMATE CHANGE

CHANGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Elders shared the environmental changes they had seen in their lifetimes. Ecosystems have changed, as evidenced by wetlands drying up, unprecedented northern snow and ice melt, and heavy metal accumulation. Development has affected ecosystems, including land fragmentation caused by seismic activity. Water pollution has been observed through the impacts of acid rain, fecal contamination, and heavy metal accumulation. Aquatic ecosystems have also been affected by increased water temperatures. The air and atmosphere have also changed notably as evidenced by the occurrence of extreme and unpredictable weather as well as changes in seasonal cycles.

IMPACTS

Elders have expressed their concerns about the impact of environmental changes they have observed on animals, plants, and humans. Deformity of fish and tumour growths on mammals are being seen. Diseases, including chronic wasting disease, and an increase in parasites such as ticks are a concern. Animal populations are decreasing and experiencing abnormal shifts, and migration routes are being altered. Plant growth cycles and entire plant communities are being altered, and plant species are being lost. Contamination from spraying and heavy metal accumulation are occurring in plant communities. Human health has been affected, with increased chronic health conditions including diabetes, heart disease, and cancer contributed to by food contamination from pollution. Animal illness and concerns about disease transmission can also affect human health. Contaminated water has resulted in many boil-water advisories. Commercial fishing and trapping have been restricted, and hydro development has negatively affected the traditional way of life. All this affects the living of traditional lives, restricting access to ceremonial foods, medicines, hunting, and trapping.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Importance of Natural Law: Elders say that we must rely on the Creator, and follow the Creator's laws. Ceremonies and prayer are critical to ensuring the health of all relations on this earth and to honouring and respecting Mother Earth. "The end of the world isn't coming, but the end of our way of life is close. That's why it's telling us: learn your language, learn your culture, learn your history. Take care of this earth." - Kevin T. (Sioux Valley)

Food Sovereignty: Elders spoke about how important it is to maintain hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering practices, as well as to grow gardens and can foods. Elders voiced their concerns about water quality and advocated for clean drinking water for all. "The foods our ancestors used to get were in the bush. The animals that we hunt down, the buffalo, the deer, the moose, they eat all these grasses, this medicine that's out there. They eat that and we eat that moose or the deer, that's what makes us healthy and strong. We're not eating that traditional way that was meant for us to live." - Alvin B. (Red Pheasant)

Guiding Future Generations: Elders wish to see the connection restored between youth and land. The transmission of spiritual and cultural knowledge from Elders to youth is vital in guiding future generations' engagements with the environment. Young people must learn the physical changes to the land and seasonal cycles, as well as understand the importance and significance of protocols and offerings. "This is our chance to teach. This is our last chance. Our chance is to teach all young people how to think together, how to see together, how to listen together, and how to talk together so they can survive." - Randall T. (Yukon)

RECONCILIATION

EDUCATION

With the lasting effects of residential schools still part of our lives, education is an important topic when it comes to reconciliation. Many Elders speak of their time at residential schools, or the experiences of their parents and grandparents. They recall how they longed to return home, and learn from the land or their ancestors, but had to stay within those walls. Many Elders who spoke at the gathering stated that Indigenous histories, treaties, and the Indian Act must be taught accurately and from an Indigenous perspective in schools today. Elders suggested that the first step to reconciliation is to teach our children and grandchildren, and build the understanding of why we need reconciliation in Canada.

INDIGENOUS/CANADIAN RELATIONS

Understanding the meaning of "reconciliation," respecting Indigenous histories and culture, is essential to the healing and partnership between Indigenous peoples and Canadians. True reconciliation cannot happen without respect, understanding, and responsibility. Many Elders state that reconciliation will not happen unless the government takes responsibility for its ongoing actions, the rate of incarcerated Indigenous peoples is lowered, and there is a true inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls +. The most common statement from Elders was that reconciliation starts within oneself and then moves to relationships with the government and Canadians.





RECOMMENDATIONS

In all of the conversations about Indigenous/Canada relations, discussions of residential schools, and other by-products of designed assimilation, many Elders echoed similar sentiments about moving forward. Elders recognized the need to pass on knowledge to future generations, and to begin reconciliation with oneself; however, and more importantly, they stressed the importance of achieving balance—balance in all areas of life, but most importantly a focus on the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being of Indigenous communities. They explained how this will translate to improvement in all areas of life, while maintaining Indigenous values and increasing a sense of pride in what it means to be Indigenous. In summary, the Elders' recommendation is to realign oneself with Indigenous values and continue to fight for equitable treatment from government and a seat at the table to better Indigenous peoples' position in this country.

**"Reconciliation is picking up the pieces and putting them together again"
-Irvin W. (Peguis First Nation)**

CULTURE & LANGUAGE

ENHANCE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN SCHOOLS

Many Elders have stressed the importance of teaching Indigenous languages and culture in schools, not only to support literacy development but also to preserve languages such as Anishinaabemowin, to name but one. Elders shared several methods that have helped them teach, such as making their students close their eyes and truly listen to a word, feel the language and repeat it until it feels right phonetically. Many words in Indigenous languages hold deeper meanings and have a cultural component to them that many would not understand without Elders' guidance; this is why Elders are essential to language revitalization.

SPEAK YOUR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REGULARLY

It is important to support children and youth by offering them the opportunity to learn their Indigenous languages. One of the most effective ways of teaching Indigenous languages to young children and youth is through regular use and conversation. This encourages the younger generation to come to visit, sit, and share conversations. This is where the learning starts. Parents and grandparents need to be involved. In addition to this, try to speak as much of the language as possible and do not be discouraged if a word is pronounced incorrectly; fluent speakers will still be able to understand.





MAKE CONNECTIONS TO THE LAND

Encourage and support language development by offering opportunities for land-based camps that incorporate regular use of Indigenous languages and culture to children, youth and adults finding their way back to their communities. Along with guidance and knowledge from Elders in the community, land-based language camps not only ensure that participants learn to speak their Indigenous language but also encourage them to learn about the land, their culture, and traditional roles. Returning to the land in this fashion fosters oral tradition, the building of strong relationships between generations, the use of Indigenous languages, and the passing on of cultural teachings.

SHARING ORAL TRADITION

“Every Nation is coming to recognize the importance of the survival of the language” (Mike, Mohawk). Oral tradition encompasses the teaching of creation stories, which includes spending time with Elders from your community through visiting, sharing, ceremony, and celebrations. If stories are not told, they will quickly fade. “You need culture and language so that you can walk with it, as it has a spirit” (Ron D., 2017). Revitalization of language means spending time with Elders and the environment. This is who we are, these teachings were given to us by the Creator. This is our home, the foundation of who we are as a people.

STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

Elders shared stories of their struggle to reclaim their language, culture, and identities caused by trauma sustained while attending residential schools. Many Elders shared their own personal experiences of times when they felt lost, disconnected, or outcast, but also of finding their way back to their culture and language.

Despite some resurgence of culture and language, Elders have witnessed the same cycle of intergenerational trauma occurring in younger generations. Having both culture and language is thus essential to Indigenous identities, and this is what is needed to strengthen our nations. "Without our language, who are we?" -Ruth N. (audio 1:15, 2019)

RESPECT FOR CULTURE & LANGUAGE KEEPERS

In order to build respect for Elders, knowledge keepers, and language teachers, we need to value their contributions to teaching our children and youth about culture and language. Teaching language classes in schools means recognizing that physical space is needed to teach students. We also need to provide opportunities to learn from Elders in the community, which encourages respect for language teachers. Funding is also needed for language development resources and for honoraria for Elders who teach and visit the students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teaching culture and Indigenous languages in schools preserves and passes on teachings to children and youth.
- Funding and provision of language development resources, as well as classrooms for teaching children and youth, are also needed.
- Practice speaking your Indigenous language in your homes with your parents and grandparents.
- Land-based teachings encourage language and cultural development through work with Elders. Going back to the land encourages people to learn our way of life and our languages. "We have to go back and we have to go home."
- Culture and language are fundamental to nation-building and the resurgence of Indigenous governance and self-determination; they are essential and should be treated as such.
- Develop partnerships that encourage culture and language development, with Elders leading the way.
- Listen to the Elder(s), whose knowledge and teachings are key to self-determination and nation-building.

INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIP CAPSTONE (NS 430)

Ten students from the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta created this booklet as a community service learning project for the Indigenous Governance and Partnership Capstone course. NS 430 is the final course in the Certificate in Indigenous Governance and Partnership. The governance program focuses on the theory and practice necessary to explore Indigenous resurgence and revitalization through the lens of Indigenous self-determination. The program centres on developing knowledge while increasing skills suited to the unique governance issues and opportunities facing Indigenous peoples and their non-Indigenous partners. This capstone course enables students to complete a service project for an Indigenous organization or community.

We are honoured to partner with NGE Kanata this term. Students spent over twenty hours each listening to the audio from the 2017 and 2019 National Gathering of Elders. This booklet summarizes the Elders' knowledge recorded during the workshops held during the two national gatherings.

Thank you to the students who put this booklet together. Thank you to Renee Ouellette for designing it. The summaries were prepared by:

- Melanie Dene and Claude Isabelle Robergeau (Workshops on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, +);
- Samantha Atkinson and Anna Fulks (Workshops on Elders and Caring for the Caregiver);
- Kelsi-Leigh Balaban and Robin Howse (Workshops on Climate Change);
- Renee Ouellette and Anthony Alexander-Hume (Workshops on Reconciliation); and
- Pamela Greene and Shailley Peacock (Workshops on Revitalizing Language and Culture).

Thank you to the Elders for sharing their wisdom.

PCCF'Δ³ kitatamihin,

Dr. Shalene Jobin

Director of Indigenous Governance

Associate Professor

Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF NATIVE STUDIES
INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE