



# Literature Review of Urban Indigenous Space & Service Delivery

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## Disclaimer

This report was produced as part of the UBC Sustainability Scholars Program, a partnership between the University of British Columbia and various local governments and organizations in support of providing graduate students with opportunities to do applied research on projects that advance sustainability and climate action across the region.

This project was conducted under the mentorship of City of Vancouver staff. The opinions and recommendations in this report and any errors are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of City of Vancouver or the University of British Columbia.

## Territorial Acknowledgement

I am a first-generation Chinese immigrant-settler who has had the immense privilege to study, learn, and work on the unceded ancestral lands of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílw̓ ətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

As I continue my journey as a community planner, I am committed to deepening my understanding of the rich history and culture of the land I inhabit and honouring the enduring expertise and stewardship of the Indigenous Peoples who have cared for this land since time immemorial.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my project mentors, Jesse Bierman, Ada Chan-Russell, Hilal Kina, for their invaluable guidance and support since the start of this project. Additionally, I would like to extend my gratitude to the key informants of this project for sharing their insights and expertise during this project. Your contributions have been instrumental in shaping the direction and success of this project.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

On October 25th, 2022, the City of Vancouver approved the first strategy of its kind to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in a municipal context. With 95% of Indigenous residents within Vancouver city boundary living outside the Musqueam reserve and the city hosting one of the largest urban Indigenous populations in Canada, there is a critical need to increase culturally safe spaces and account for the unique conditions and impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples who are living away from their traditional territories and now make Vancouver home.

Planning plays a critical role in shaping the environments where communities live, work, and thrive. The work of creating a healthy, thriving, and connected communities for all is not the responsibility of municipalities alone, non-profit organizations dedicated to social justice, community development, and empowerment priorities are vital allies to actualizing this shared vision with the City. Community organizations often serve as the on-the-ground convener across individuals and family units, and are positioned as the backbone of the relational efforts to tackle systemic issues from the ground up.

Supporting the development of urban Indigenous spaces and service delivery is a crucial aspect of the City's commitment to fostering the self-determination of Indigenous populations. By prioritizing these spaces, municipalities have the opportunity to address and redress the concept of "urbs nullius"<sup>1</sup>, a concept coined by Indigenous scholar and political theorist Coulthard to refer to how urban areas have historically been stripped of Indigenous sovereign presence and land rights through the processes of city building and gentrification. Enabling the success of urban Indigenous organizations is an important first step to create a more equitable and inclusive city that acknowledges and respects the rights of all Indigenous peoples in Canada and fosters the diverse fabric of Indigenous cultural heritage in Vancouver.

By reviewing the existing policy landscape and case studies, this project seeks to outline how the City of Vancouver can support Indigenous-led initiatives and amplify community efforts that are driven by the non-profit sector in an effort to address the deeply engrained legacy of inequities and injustices experienced by urban Indigenous residents within Vancouver.

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<sup>1</sup> Coulthard, G. S., & Project Muse University Press eBooks. (2014). *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition* (1st ed.). University of Minnesota Press.

## Research Approach

Project learnings, findings and recommendations are derived from:

- **Environmental scan and literature review** to identify examples of urban Indigenous space and service delivery models
- **Interviews with key informant** to understand present work on addressing space needs of urban Indigenous communities

The author would like to extend his heartfelt gratitude to the key informants who generously shared their time, insights, and expertise to this project. Your invaluable contributions provided a deeper understanding to the issues explored in this report. Your openness, and willingness to engage in thoughtful dialogue is appreciated. Findings from key informants have been anonymized and integrated throughout this report.

The following key informants were consulted during this project:

- **Wendy Koo**, City of Calgary
- **Wayne Wallace**, First Nation Health Authority
- **Rachel Wuttunee**, City of Vancouver

## Recommendations

This report calls upon the City of Vancouver to:

- **Facilitate the self-determination of Urban Indigenous priorities** when making decisions about investment, partnership, and matching of spaces by including respectful urban Indigenous engagement from the beginning
- **Support the co-location of urban Indigenous service delivery organizations** in providing wrap-around services and a community model of care
- **Improve city processes and efficiencies for social change** by systematically prioritizing urban Indigenous social infrastructure with an intersectional lens and equity-oriented approach
- **Incentivize and prioritize Indigenous service delivery** that includes community entrepreneurship programming, connected to the idea of building resilience
- **Implement a systematic reporting of space use and impact** using existing council-approved mechanisms, such that equity and reconciliation commitments can be held accountable

## PROJECT CONTEXT

### Unpacking Terminology

**Language is important.** The terms that are used today are embedded in a historical context, informing the path and vision into the future.

In the context of this project, the following description of urban Indigenous people from the City of Vancouver’s 2024 UNDRIP Action Plan<sup>2</sup> is used: “First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples who live in urban settings and outside of their traditional territories”. The term urban Indigenous should be treated with nuances, as it is intended to be an overarching term that captures the migration patterns of Indigenous people in urban centres over the past 70 years.

These waves of migration patterns exist at the nexus of institutional and interpersonal factors, as some First Nations people have been pushed out of their home communities due to changes in Indian status over the years,<sup>3</sup> while others have been encouraged to migrate into urban centres in the pursuit of economic, educational, or other opportunities. The “Double Mother Rule”<sup>4</sup> under the Indian Act further stipulated that if a First Nations man married a woman without Indian status, after two consecutive generations of inter-marriages, the children would lose their Indian status. Moreover, not all First Nations people living in urban centres consider themselves to be away from home given the varying connections they hold to their ancestral territories.

First Nations Peoples have complex and evolving relationships with all levels of government.

**Jurisdictions are not straightforward and can be contentious, resulting in ambiguity that may impede access to essential human rights such as access to health care and social services.**

Historically, colonial governments and institutions have classified First Nations people according to their residency status, distinguishing between those living on-reserve and those living off-reserve.

The functional reason for this terminology is to distinguish jurisdictional divides between on- and off-reserve services – where the Federal Government is seen to have jurisdiction over on-reserve matters, and the provincial government is viewed to have jurisdiction over off-reserve matters.

This jurisdictional complexity has also left some people, such as non-status First Nations or Métis

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<sup>2</sup> City of Vancouver. (2024) UNDRIP Action Plan 2024-2028. <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/undrip-action-plan-2024-2028.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> UBC Indigenous Foundations, Enfranchisement

<sup>4</sup> UBC Indigenous Foundations. Bill C-31. [https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/bill\\_c-31/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/bill_c-31/)

people, in what the Supreme Court of Canada has referred to as a “jurisdictional wasteland”<sup>5</sup>, where both federal and provincial governments have denied legislative authority over these segments of Indigenous populations.

Across Canada, municipalities and planners are discussing how UNDRIP can and should change planning approaches and practices to advance reconciliation with the diverse Indigenous fabric residing within cities. The City of Vancouver has undertaken initiative and engagement to understand what Indigenous right entail, and how they manifest within urban environments.

**Page 6** provides an overview of key milestones in how the Social Policy Division at the City of Vancouver is advancing the city-wide commitment to reconciliation.

In alignment with existing guideline on using respectful and accurate terminology, the following definition was adopted from City of Vancouver UNDRIP Action Plan<sup>6</sup> and UBC Indigenous Foundations<sup>7</sup>:

- **Indian (Indian Status):** A First Nations person as described under the Indian Act. This word is not used except as a legal term
- **Aboriginal:** Refers to the first inhabitants of Canada, and includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. This is often used to reflect the language of Aboriginal rights and titles as reflected in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution. This term is used in this report to reflect the existing language within any referenced legislations and official documents.
- **Indigenous:** A term that refers to First peoples who are the original inhabitants of a place, used particularly to distinguish First Peoples from later settlers in colonial settings. In this document the term “Indigenous” is used throughout. Canada recognizes three distinct groups of Indigenous people: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

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<sup>5</sup> Daniels v. Canada (Indian Affairs and Northern Development), 2016 SCC 12, para. 14.

<sup>6</sup> City of Vancouver. (2024) UNDRIP Action Plan 2024-2028

<sup>7</sup> UBC Indigenous Foundations. Terminology. <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/>

## Royal Commission on Aboriginal People Findings

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was established in 1991 to investigate the conditions of Indigenous peoples in Canada and to propose solutions for improving their well-being. The Commission's final report, released in 1996, comprehensively addressed various issues affecting Indigenous communities, including the distinct needs of urban Indigenous populations. Recognizing that a significant and growing portion of the Indigenous population resides in urban areas, RCAP highlighted the unique challenges this demographic faces when compared to those living on reserves or in rural settings.

Volume 4 of RCAP<sup>8</sup> specifically expands on many issues affecting urban Indigenous peoples. After extensive research and community consultation, **the report articulated four critical issues facing urban Indigenous Peoples:**

1. Challenges to cultural identity
2. Exclusion from opportunities for self-determination
3. Experiences of racism & discrimination
4. Difficulty of finding culturally appropriate services

RCAP has been instrumental in advocating for an urban governance structure of urban Indigenous peoples grounded in the spirit of self-determination. Specifically, RCAP proposed systems for urban self-determination that included Indigenous peoples' involvement in decision-making processes at a local level, especially in areas that are relevant to the acknowledgment and preservation of Indigenous cultural identity.

RCAP has acknowledged that no single form of urban Indigenous government is suitable for every city due to the diversity of Indigenous communities. However, it has proposed systems for urban self-determination that include Indigenous peoples' involvement in decision-making processes at a local level, especially in areas that are relevant to the acknowledgement and preservation of Indigenous cultural identity. In an urban context, they further recommended a form of Nation-based urban governance – where the host nations of a territory can assume governance responsibilities for the needs and interests of urban Indigenous citizens on their home territory once they have sufficient capacity to do so.

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<sup>8</sup> Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol. 4 : Perspectives and Realities. Ottawa: The Commission, 1996.



## City of Vancouver's Actions on Urban Indigenous Issues

Central to the City of Vancouver's approach to reconciliation and implementing UNDRIP is the recognition of the host Nations, namely Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations hold unique title and rights as the first stewards and governments of these lands.<sup>9</sup> These land-based rights are distinct from the rights of the large and diverse populations of Indigenous people from other territories who have come to live in Vancouver.

A **distinction-based approach** takes on this disaggregated lens to understanding the nuances of specific rights, experiences, priorities, and needs, while nurturing the foundation of solidarity amongst Indigenous communities.

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### KEY MILESTONES

**2013:** The Year of Reconciliation declared in Vancouver

**2014:** Vancouver declared a City of Reconciliation and declaration issued acknowledging Vancouver located on unceded territories of the three host Nations

**2016:** A MOU is signed with the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) to work together to address unique needs of urban Indigenous peoples

MVAEC was founded in 2008 to respond to the urban Aboriginal community's vision for a more collaborative, strategic, and unified voice across Metro Vancouver. The council includes 22 diverse Aboriginal non-profit organizations and is regularly engaged with decision making processes at the City of Vancouver

**2018:** Saa'ust Centre opened as a space supporting families and survivors affected by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)

**2019:** City Council approved the largest addictions rehabilitation centre in BC, with the integration of Indigenous social enterprise in the redevelopment at 1636 Clark Drive

**2020:** City Council approved \$2 million of capital funding to locate and construct a new Saa'ust Centre healing space in partnership with Aboriginal Land Trust Society (ALTS)

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<sup>9</sup> City of Vancouver. (2022) City of Vancouver's UNDRIP Strategy. <https://council.vancouver.ca/20221025/documents/p1.pdf>

**2021:** Engagement with various urban Indigenous groups developed 131 potential indicators for the Healthy City Dashboard to define health from an urban Indigenous lens

**2021:** City Council created the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) Task Force, in partnership with Musqueam Indian Band, Squamish Nation, and Tsleil – Waututh Nation

**2022:** Council approves UNDRIP strategy for Vancouver

**2023:** Partnership for Healthy Cities supported work with MVAEC to explore urban Indigenous community-identified health indicators and a potential data governance model

**2023:** Council approves \$700,000 Social Infrastructure grant to create a First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women-led Healing and Wellness Centre at 41 East Hastings



## UNPACKING URBAN INDIGENOUS SERVICE DELIVERY

### Service Delivery Models: Status-Blind & Group-Specific

Service delivery refers to the general process that connects a service from a provider to a client.<sup>10</sup> Social infrastructure, at its core, refers to the physical buildings and gathering spaces that support the delivery of essential social services, such as education, healthcare, and community development. Indigenous service delivery is then essential to cultivating interconnected networks within and across physical and social locations where urban Indigenous communities can come together and enhance overall wellbeing. The attention to culturally safe programs and services is necessary to prevent reproducing intergenerational trauma.

As Indigenous people increasingly moved to urban centres in the 1950s and 1960s, urban Indigenous communities established service organizations to address gaps in culturally appropriate services.<sup>11</sup> Today, Indigenous organizations provide essential support to help people transition to life in the city. The 2016 census estimated 61,455 Indigenous people (self-identifying as Aboriginal in the census) living in Metro Vancouver, with nearly 58,000 living outside of reserve communities in the region. As many individuals do not self-identify as Aboriginal peoples, this figure has been described as an undercount<sup>12</sup> of the true number of Indigenous people living in urban Vancouver.

With nearly 14,000 people counted in the census within the City of Vancouver, the largest numbers of Indigenous residents live in central and north-eastern neighbourhoods. As indicated in **Figure 1**, Strathcona and Grandview-Woodland have the largest percentage of population identifying as Aboriginal on the census.

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<sup>10</sup> Piette, Vincent. How Service Canada can Improve Service Delivery to Urban Indigenous Peoples: Literature Review and Recommendations 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Collier, Brittany, Services for Indigenous People Living in Urban Areas. 2020.

<sup>12</sup> City of Vancouver. Healthy City Dashboard Urban Indigenous Indicators, 2021. <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/report-ktcl-healthy-city-indigenous-indicators-summer-2021.pdf>

**Figure 1:** urban Indigenous population by local areas in Vancouver<sup>13</sup>

Table by local area:

	Estimated Aboriginal population census 2016	Percentage of area population
Grandview-Woodland	2,265	7.8%
Downtown	1,430	2.4%
Hastings-Sunrise	1,100	3.2%
West End	1,070	2.3%
Kensington-Cedar Cottage	1,005	2.1%
Strathcona	990	10.0%
Mount Pleasant	980	3.0%
Renfrew-Collingwood	870	1.7%
Kitsilano	735	1.7%
Fairview	585	1.8%
Sunset	530	1.5%
Killarney	425	1.5%
Riley Park	420	1.9%
Victoria-Fraserview	385	1.3%
Marpole	370	1.5%
West Point Grey	170	1.3%
Arbutus-Ridge	140	0.9%
South Cambie	120	1.6%
Oakridge	90	0.7%
Dunbar-Southlands (not including Musqueam reserve community)	85	0.4%
Shaughnessy	65	0.8%
Kerrisdale	65	0.5%
<b>Total City of Vancouver</b>	<b>13,895</b>	<b>2.2%</b>

In the context of this project, Indigenous service delivery can be categorized into two sectors:

- **Public Sector:** First Nations Health Authority and Indigenous Services Canada are entities that provide delivery of health and social services primarily to Status Indians given its ties to federal funding. Public sector service delivery by the Federal Government is often tied to one’s Indian status and place of residence.
- **Non-Profit Service Delivery Providers:** Federal government has had a history of downloading/devolving service delivery and programming to the third sector. Yet, this devolution of responsibility to First Nations and Indigenous-led third sector does not amount to self-government as “control over programs, policies and budgets remains with the Crown”

Today, Friendship Centers are the largest service delivery infrastructure serving the urban Indigenous population across urban centers in Canada. Friendship Centers in Canada emerged out of a grassroot movement in the 1950s as more Indigenous peoples started moving to cities.<sup>14</sup> **Friendship centers in Canada take on a status-blind approach** in their culturally-based and community-run programs and services, which means anyone regardless of Aboriginal status can make use of the services and programming offered. The centre often functions as both the site of both social service provision and cultural revitalization in urban spaces.

<sup>13</sup> City of Vancouver. Healthy City Dashboard Urban Indigenous Indicators, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres. Urban Indigenous Wellness Report. A Friendship Centre Perspective, 2020. <https://bcaafc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/BCAAFC-Urban-Indigenous-Wellness-Report.pdf>

In other cases, Indigenous organizations **provide services to specific Indigenous groups and communities**. This is exemplified by the different organizations within Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC): an umbrella organization providing coordination and planning for programs and services for its 22 member organizations. The nature of programs and services span across several sectors, including education and training, with a focus on specific population groups like Indigenous youth, women. Examples of this include:

- **Indigenous Women Rise Society:** dedicated to cultivating safe spaces for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women to gather, learn and celebrate.<sup>15</sup>
- **Urban Native Youth Association:** supporting youth through prevention-focused, culturally-responsive programs for urban Indigenous youth.<sup>16</sup>
- **Nations supporting their urban families living off-reserve:** The Roots program offered by Carrier-Sekani Family services, is designed to help children in care connect with their families and culture.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Indigenous Women Rise Society URL: <https://www.indigenouswomenrise.ca/>

<sup>16</sup> Urban Native Youth Association URL: <https://unya.bc.ca/>

<sup>17</sup> Carrier-Sekani Family Services URL: <https://www.csfs.org/>

## What do we know as service needs?

In addressing the questions of service priority areas and how space should be used by non-profit organizations, the following section reflects a synthesis of existing reports published by government, urban Indigenous organizations and services. A key direction in the City of Vancouver's UNDRIP Action Plan is now focused on developing a coordinated urban Indigenous engagement process and protocols.<sup>18</sup> These efforts are grounded in right relations with the local Nations and addressing the priorities of urban Indigenous community members. The forthcoming Urban Indigenous Engagement Framework will provide a more comprehensive approach in determining place-based, group-specific priorities and gaps in the context of Vancouver.

**The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network** in their 2016 report of Urban Aboriginal Service Delivery Landscape Across Canada found:<sup>19</sup>

- There is a continuing need for the funding of economic participation initiatives (i.e.: youth employment, relationship building with non-Indigenous communities)
- Gaps in services related to mental health, youth who “age out” of care, programming for men, housing, and health care

When zooming into the context of Vancouver specifically, UAKN's Western Research Centre published a report<sup>20</sup> to identify some of the unique barriers and challenges facing Indigenous Elders in Vancouver's Downtown East Side. Some highlights from the report include:

- Downtown Eastside service providers estimate 30-40% of those living in the neighborhood as Indigenous compared to city wide (2%)
- There is a higher proportion of senior populations compared to other local areas
- Cultural teachings and beliefs have shown that increasing intergenerational connections can help increase social mobility through self-development
- Report suggested service providers to better communicate with Indigenous Elders and seniors as many are unaware of existing resources
- Overall lack of elder-specific health resources, including mental-health support for seniors

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<sup>18</sup> City of Vancouver, UNDRIP Action Plan, 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network's National Project. *Phase 2: The Urban Aboriginal Service Delivery Landscape: Themes, Trends, Gaps and Prospects*, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Kruz, Tyesa and Canada Commons: Documents. *Inclusion in Mainstream Spaces, Services and Programs in Vancouver's Inner City: Comparing the Experiences and Perceptions of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Seniors* Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, 2019.

In the 2021 report<sup>21</sup> commissioned by the City of Vancouver to map out potential urban Indigenous health indicators, several entry points into urban Indigenous issues and how they can be measured have also been identified:

- **Preventative Health:** provide more preventative health programming for all age groups and genders, including exercise, nutrition, alcohol and drug prevention, suicide and injury prevention and counselling
- **Cultural & Spiritual Health:** increase access to cultural practices, cultural/spiritual healing spaces, healers, counselling, and healing initiatives
- **Land-based Food Connections:** promote urban Indigenous access and involvement in community gardens and land-based activities – with a focus on involving youth
- **Sport Excellence:** support Indigenous elite sporting programs and increase investment into Indigenous sports organizations

The purpose in outlining existing service needs is not to offer an exhaustive list of urban Indigenous specific space needs and community aspirations in Vancouver, but rather to provide background knowledge to support future engagement, collaboration, and decision-making with urban Indigenous entities. Community needs and aspirations are not static, but rather a function of the changing circumstances in the urban landscape.

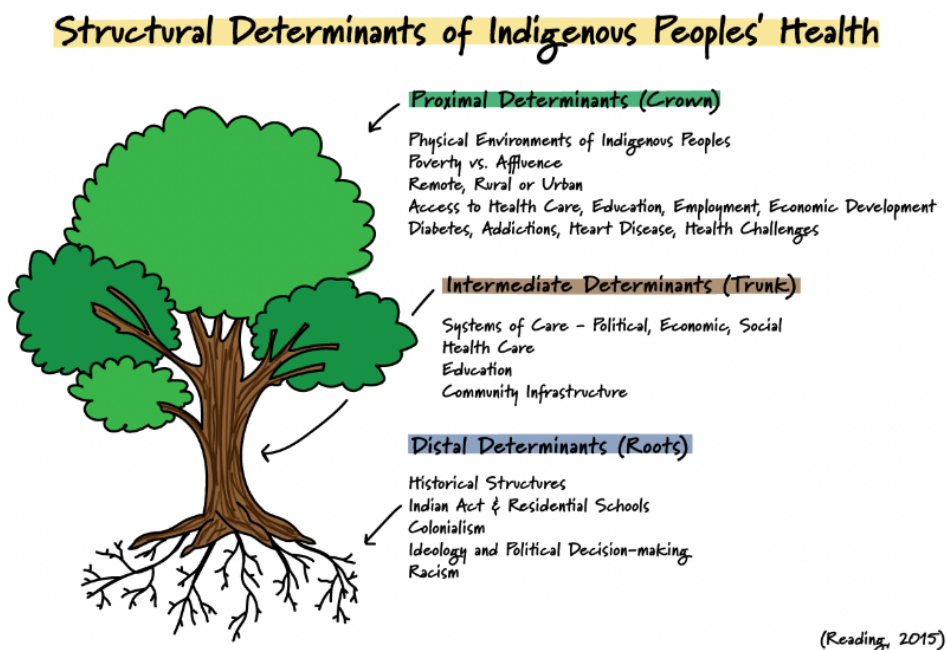
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<sup>21</sup> City of Vancouver. Healthy City Dashboard Urban Indigenous Indicators, 2021.

## Addressing Root Causes of Inequities

Indigenous disparities in health, economic, and social outcomes can be described as the culminating product of systemic injustices across time and scales of institutional designs. Drawing on diverse Indigenous paradigms, health scholar Reading uses the metaphor of a tree to conceptualize how various scales of determinants come together to interplay health at the level of an individual.<sup>22</sup> The tree metaphor, exemplified in **Figure 2**, shows how the various scale of health determinants are interconnected, and are dependent on other for sustenance.

- **Distal determinants** are the deep-rooted, macro-level factors like racism, social exclusion, and self-determination. They form the foundation from which other determinants evolve, shaping both intermediate and proximal determinants of Indigenous wellness.
- **Intermediate determinants** connect distal and proximal determinants by influencing health through systems and resources like healthcare access, education, environmental stewardship, and community infrastructure.
- **Proximal determinants** directly impact health in visible ways, affecting physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. These include health behaviors, physical and social environments, employment, income, education, and food security.



**Figure 2:** Structural Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health (Reading, 2015)

<sup>22</sup> Reading, C. (2015) "Structural Determinants of Aboriginal Peoples' Health"



Arguably – planners as system makers and changers, operate at the intermediate determinants level, where planning interventions can both mitigate the harmful legacy of root causes and produce cascading effects at the distal determinant level. To better illuminate this inter-relationship: by securing affordable and accessible spaces for non-profit organizations, planners can re-distribute resources in the urban environment and empower non-profits to serve urban Indigenous communities more effectively.

**Reading further offers a few entry points for policymakers to engage with structural determinants as a mechanism to address health inequities.**<sup>23</sup> Namely, policy includes:

- Ensuring that no Indigenous child is denied the basic resources for healthy development
- Creating fair employment opportunities and work environments for Indigenous peoples
- Supporting Indigenous peoples to maximize their capacities and self-determination
- Facilitating the development of healthy and sustainable Indigenous communities
- Ensuring that policy decisions are based on balancing social stratification

**Cities and urban centres have functioned as a critical space of Indigenous resurgence and community development.** Despite the terrain of persistent settler colonialism riddled by exclusionary policies, Indigenous social movements have always endeavoured to actualize urban Indigenous right to the city through self-governing, community-based, and community-owned organizations.<sup>24</sup> Space and service-delivery- has been a central part to urban Indigenous collectives asserting their claims and presence in cities. It is through community connections and gatherings that urban Indigenous communities have cultivated their own institutions, social infrastructure, and social economies over the decades.

In the context of Canadian cities, Indigenous social infrastructure has created jobs; improved educational outcomes; improved health and wellbeing; encouraged social inclusion; created sustainable communities of associations; improved First Nations peoples' access to facilities, services, and programs; reinvigorated culture; and increased Indigenous social mobility (Newhouse, 2003). These indicators of success for Indigenous social infrastructure spans across distal, intermediate, and proximal determinants of health. By supporting the functions and success of Indigenous social infrastructure, City of Vancouver will continue to make progress to address root causes of Indigenous health and social disparities.

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<sup>23</sup> Reading, C. (2015) "Structural Determinants of Aboriginal Peoples' Health"

<sup>24</sup> Heritz, J. (2018) From Self-Determination to Service Delivery.

## Considerations for Promoting Urban Indigenous Social Infrastructure

### 1. Support Indigenous wellness through co-location of wrap-around services

The City currently addresses the needs of urban Indigenous populations for space and programming on a project-by-project basis. Planning for urban Indigenous space and service delivery largely depends on emerging redevelopment opportunities and funding made available by the market, the non-profit sector, and/or the provincial government. While this strategy has allowed for some flexibility in responding to the present needs, coordinated planning is needed to ensure that Indigenous-led and-serving spaces and services across Vancouver are suitable and complementary with each other meet community needs.

The idea of wrap-around services first emerged as a method of engaging with children and youth with the highest levels of mental health needs, and their families, so that they can live in their homes and communities.<sup>25</sup> Unlike other models of care, the wraparound service model embraces each client’s unique strengths, needs, and natural support systems. Wraparound services offer holistic care systems that prioritize common goals identified by the child or youth, their family, and care team leadership. There is now strong evidence that, when wraparound is done well, young people with complex needs are more likely to be able to stay in their homes and communities, or, should a crisis occur, to be in out-of-home placements for shorter periods of time.<sup>26</sup>

Wraparound services differ from “core services” that are focused on diagnosis and treatment of addictive disorders. As supportive services, wraparound services are “psychosocial services that treatment programs may provide to facilitate access, improve retention, and address clients’ co-occurring problems.”<sup>27</sup> Here, the provision of mental health, employment, and medical services has been associated with improved treatment outcomes, whereas the provision of transportation assistance and childcare has been found to enhance treatment retention.

In a qualitative research project published in 2019, Urban Indigenous elders of Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society in the City of Kelowna locate mental wellness at the intersection of community relationships, land, language, and culture.<sup>28</sup> Elders drew their understandings both explicitly or implicitly from the four quadrants of medicine wheel model – where mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual are all accounted for. By providing a holistic approach, wrap-around services help

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<sup>25</sup> National Wraparound Initiative, 2019. Wraparound Basics: FAQ.

<sup>26</sup> Stroul, B. (2015). Return on investment in Systems of Care.

<sup>27</sup> Schill et al., (2019). Everything is Related and It All Leads Up to My Mental Well-being.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

individuals stabilize their lives, reduce relapse rates, and improve their overall quality of life, making long-term recovery more attainable. This integrated support system ensures that all aspects of a person's life are considered, leading to more effective and sustainable recovery outcomes.

Wraparound service provision is closely related to space because the effectiveness of these services often depends on the availability and design of physical environments where services are delivered. Wraparound services are grounded in a holistic approach to care, where various supports—such as health care, education, social services, and community resources—are coordinated and provided in a way that is tailored to the individual or family's unique needs.

For these services to be effective, they require accessible, safe, and appropriate physical spaces where multiple providers can collaborate, and where individuals and families feel comfortable receiving care. These spaces need to be designed to facilitate the integration of different services, often requiring dedicated areas for private consultations, group activities, and communal engagement. The availability of such spaces can significantly influence the quality and accessibility of wraparound services, as well as the ability to create a welcoming and supportive environment that encourages participation and long-term commitment from those being served.



**Figure 3:** Key Components of Wraparound Principles<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.co.polk.or.us/bh/polk-county-wraparound-services>

## 2. Deficit-based and Asset-based Framing

Data – whether it’s from engagement or literature review, is essential to making informed and evidence-based decisions about planning for social infrastructure, ensuring that the specific needs of urban Indigenous communities are met efficiently. One approach to decolonizing data processes involves shifting away from deficit-based approaches to health monitoring, and towards processes and indicators that reflect the assets, strengths, and aspirations of communities.<sup>30</sup>

Yet recent engagement insight from Partnership for Health Cities project on urban Indigenous data revealed several practical considerations on why deficit-based data still has its place:<sup>31</sup>

- Deficit data captures disparities and inequities that is experienced on the ground, and this is a mechanism to hold the City accountable
- Issues like homelessness, substance abuse and ongoing gender-based violence have a profound, deficit experience in reality
- Deficit-based indicators offers a clear visualization of gaps and issues for organization to apply for fundings and sustain their programs and services.

In reviewing this engagement summary,<sup>32</sup> it becomes apparent that both deficit-based and asset-based data monitoring and evaluation has a well-suited function that each intends to fulfill. To work with deficit-based data in a responsible and trauma-informed way, some of the proposed steps include:

- Focusing on trends instead of rates
- Reframing calculations (i.e.: people above poverty line instead of below it)
- Finding complementary data that pairs indicators involving gaps with those reflecting strengths
- Focusing on solutions
- Developing qualitative evaluation indicators

Therefore, when it comes to delivering space and social infrastructure, **adopting an asset-based framing informed by deficit-based data can play a vital role in helping cities collaborate with urban Indigenous non-profits to locate operational spaces.** Deficit-based data highlights the specific space challenges faced by Indigenous communities, such as economic hardships, insufficient spaces. This information can guide cities in identifying areas where there is a critical

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<sup>30</sup> Wuttunee, R. (2019). Indigenous Equity Data: Substance Use, Mental Health, and Wellness.

<sup>31</sup> City of Vancouver, (2024). Urban Indigenous Health Data in Vancouver, Case Study Report.

<sup>32</sup> City of Vancouver, (2024). Urban Indigenous Health Data in Vancouver, Case Study Report.

need for services and ensure that operational spaces are located where they can most effectively address these gaps.

On the other hand, asset-based data sheds light on the strengths, cultural resources, and community networks within Indigenous populations. By leveraging this data, cities can strategically place operational spaces in areas that not only address deficits but also enhance and build upon existing community assets, such as cultural hubs, social enterprises, and community expertise. Together, these data sets allow for a more informed and culturally responsive approach to space allocation, ensuring that the chosen locations are both practical and empowering for Indigenous non-profits and the communities they serve.

### **3. Alignment across City Policy Frameworks**

An ongoing portfolio of work in the City related to urban Indigenous resiliency sits within the UNDRIP Action Plan at the City's Indigenous Relations Office. The City is developing a coordinated urban Indigenous engagement process and protocols grounded in right relations with the local Nations and respect for the priorities of urban Indigenous community members. Findings from this engagement series may identify space needs, priorities, and aspirations that can be incorporated in the forthcoming social infrastructure projects.

Further, upholding principles of self-determination as stated in UNDRIP is an essential principle to ensure urban Indigenous populations take an active role in shaping their futures and ensuring that services and supports are culturally relevant.

The Healthy City Strategy offers a framework and platform to transparently communicate progress on addressing health inequities with the public. Translating the work of supporting space and service delivery as specific indicators in the Healthy City Strategy is a strategy to communicate the cascading impact of physical space in addressing root causes of health inequities. Evaluating the impact of space and service delivery further enables the iterative exercise of program improvement to ensure the long-term success of existing social infrastructure policy.

## STRATEGIC ALIGNMENTS

### MMIWG2S Portfolio

As of July 2022, the City of Vancouver adopted a plan and approach for citywide implementation of recommendations from the *Calls for Justice* outlined in (Final Report of the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls) and the *Red Women Rising* that are within the City of Vancouver’s jurisdictions.<sup>33</sup>

The *Calls for Justice* report is not proposed as recommendations; they are framed as legal obligations that require immediate action from various sectors of Canadian society directed at governments, institutions, social service providers, and all Canadians.

*Red Women Rising* is an advocacy document that seeks to influence policy and raise awareness on the urgency to address violence and systemic challenges faced by Indigenous women in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. The report highlights the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous women and survivors of violence in BC.

Relevant articles include:

- **From Final Report of the National Inquiry, Calls for Justice 1.3:** We call upon all governments, in meeting human and Indigenous rights obligations, to pursue prioritization and resourcing of the measures required to eliminate the social, economic, cultural, and political marginalization of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people when determining government activities and priorities.
- **From Final Report of the National Inquiry, Calls for Justice 4.7:** We call upon all governments to support the establishment and long-term sustainable funding of Indigenous-led low barrier shelters, safe spaces, transition homes, second-stage housing, and services for Indigenous women, and 2SLGBTQQIA people who are homeless, near homeless, dealing with food insecurity, or in poverty, and who are fleeing violence or have been subjected to sexualized violence and exploitation. All governments must ensure that shelters, transitional housing, second-stage housing, and services are appropriate to cultural needs, and available wherever Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people reside.
- **Red Women Rising Report on Safety for Indigenous Women:** “A persistent barrier in the DTES is the lack of access to safe spaces for women. While there are hundreds of agencies in the DTES, there is not a single Indigenous women’s drop-in centre operated by and for Indigenous women”.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://vancouver.ca/news-calendar/city-responds-to-the-national-inquiry-into-mmiwg-calls-for-justice-and-red-women-rising-report.aspx>

## Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The commission sets a clear direction for all levels of governments to close the gaps for Indigenous people and recognizes the role of Indigenous organizations and communities in effecting positive change. Related calls to action include:

- **Call to Action 7:** improve educational and employment gaps
- **Call to Action 20:** address distinct health needs of non-reserve Aboriginal peoples
- **Call to Action 21:** fund new healing centers
- **Call to Action 22:** recognize value of healing practices
- **Call to Action 48:** enhance self-determination in spiritual practices (practice, develop, teach and hold ceremony)

## City of Vancouver's Spaces to Thrive

Adopted by Vancouver City-Council in 2021, this 10-year strategy seeks to support Vancouver residents, especially those that face systemic barriers, to better access spaces to gather and participate in programs and services to meet their diverse needs.

- **Direction 2:** Plan a network of the right type and supply of social infrastructure that meet reconciliation, equity and resilience goals
- **Direction 2E:** Support Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving spaces and program

## HOW TO SUPPORT URBAN INDIGENOUS NGO SERVICE DELIVERY

### Current Toolbox at Social Policy

*Spaces to Thrive* is Vancouver's first strategic 10-year policy and partnership framework for City-owned and City-supported social infrastructure.<sup>34</sup> As the City continues to change and grow, *Spaces to Thrive* aims to address four key challenges facing Vancouver's social infrastructure ecosystem:

- Increasing inequity – A lack of prioritization for Indigenous, Black and cultural community spaces, accessible, women and gender diverse and other equity social-serving spaces have limited the City's ability to meet Indigenous and human rights obligations
- Insufficient social and community serving spaces
- Insufficient and unsustainable operational and capital funding – Without strategic alignment and investment in all parts of the social infrastructure – programs and spaces – access to basic human needs and meaningful places for people cannot be sustained
- Loss of community-serving spaces leads to loss of existing services and programs to communities

Since the adoption of the framework by Council in December 2021, staff is working on a 3-year action plan to provide directions on regulations, defining roles, and investment strategies for the City, and senior government.

Currently, there are **five domains of action** being conceptualized for the City's role in social development and social-serving facilities:

#### 1. New City-owned facilities: City as Owner

- The collection of Community Amenity Contributions (CAC) provides funding for social-service components – which may include affordable housing, childcare, culture, and social infrastructure.
- Forthcoming construction of social facilities should ensure right supply and type of specialized facilities to meet reconciliation, equity and resilience priorities

**Example:** 1<sup>st</sup> and Clark is an upcoming supportive housing development of approximately 60-100 units of affordable rental housing for low to moderate income households, as well as a new withdrawal management centre for people seeking treatment for addictions.

The location for this proposed project is on City-owned land, previously under-utilized with five small residential buildings, was consolidated and rezoned to support this development.

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<sup>34</sup> City of Vancouver (2021). *Spaces to Thrive: Vancouver Social Infrastructure Policy*.



The City will also be responsible for a City-owned social enterprise program space focusing on Indigenous healing and wellness through employment. The idea behind this “house of work” is to provide flexible, accessible and supported employment, such that prospective employees and clientele at the withdrawal management centre have opportunities to progress and learn more advanced skills within the social enterprise.

## 2. Renewal of City-owned Facilities: City as owner

- While it’s essential to continue growing the supply of new social serving spaces, the City is also looking into how best to ensure high quality, safe, and accessible existing social facilities and strategically proceed with replacement of older social facilities.

**Example:** Carnegie Centre is a Class A, provincially designated heritage building first built in 1903 as the Carnegie Library. Today, Carnegie Community Centre – often referred to as the living room of the Downtown Eastside by its patrons, provides vital social, educational, cultural and recreational activities on-site and nearby at Oppenheimer Park.

The programs serve low-income adults with the goal of nurturing mind, body, and spirit in a safe and welcoming environment. The community centre has engaged in a design exercise with consultants to ensure priority needs like safe and inclusive washrooms are accounted for in future space renovation. Currently, funding sources are being sought to actualize these visions.

## 3. Support of non-City owned facilities: City as partner

- The City, as a partner, adjudicates major capital grants to renew, replace, or create facilities with funding partners

**Example:** In 2023, BC housing provided a letter of support to Atira Women’s Resource Society to develop a First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women’s healing and wellness centre (IHWC) in the commercial retail unit (CRU) at Olivia Skye (41 E Hastings). This project is being co-led by Vancouver Coastal Health in partnership with the First Nations Health Authority in response to the vision and leadership of a committee of local matriarchs and women leaders from local Indigenous service providers.

The City of Vancouver Council then approved a \$700,000 Social Infrastructure Capital Grant to support renovation of the space. To ensure the site is run-well, the City has built into the tenant improvement grant agreement certain requirements for the use of the site, securing the use as an Indigenous Healing and Wellness Centre for 15 years. Staff has also ensured stipulations in the grant agreement and secure this use for the period through a covenant on title. If Atira decides to discontinue the use of this space as an IHWC before the term ends, the grant term also requires the organization to return a pro-rated amount of the grant back to the City.

#### 4. Space Matching: City as Partner and Match Maker

- The City plays a role in connecting a space according to a user's need, ranging from nominal long-term leases, swing spaces, satellite spaces, and part-time shared spaces. This process is secured with legal agreements, in the form of a partner agreement between the City and a space tenant

**Example:** Space needs of a social-serving organization can vary depending on various emerging opportunities and challenges. In 2016, Alberta Oil Corporation – Suncor Energy, announced a donation of a land parcel towards the construction of a \$30-million Native Youth Centre operated by the Urban native Youth Association (UNYA). This then presented an opportunity for the City, in partnership with UNYA, to envision a new building that consists of a youth centre, affordable housing, childcare facility, cultural support services, and a Vancouver campus for the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT).

As the organization looks to grow and expand into future development, the City is supporting UNYA to identify and provide funding support towards an interim space to ensure continuity in programming and services as the organization transitions in and out of the redevelopment process.

#### 5. Non-profit and charitable sector: City as Regulator and Liaison

- The City designs incentives, policies, and tools to promote new and redevelopment of community-owned social facilities, initiated by the community. The City is currently working on institutional policies that will promote retention and expansion of existing community spaces.

### Community & Social Service Grants for Non-Profit

The City of Vancouver offers a range of funding for non-profit social service groups and neighborhood organizations to help build strong communities in Vancouver. Below are some of the grants applicable to Urban Indigenous space and service delivery:

1. **Core Support Grant:** provides operational fundings for non-profits that address inequity and mitigates conditions that create vulnerability for residents in Vancouver
2. **Indigenous Healing and Wellness Grants:** supports Elders and Knowledge Keepers who provide traditional, spiritual, or cultural healing and wellness activities in Vancouver's urban Indigenous community
3. **Capital Project Grants:** funds capital projects that preserve or increase the capacity of facilities that address the needs of vulnerable communities in Vancouver through improvements.

## Promising Case Studies

Urban Indigenous Service Delivery organizations both in Canada, as well as in other settler colonial countries, play a crucial role in providing essential services, cultural support, and community connections for Indigenous peoples living in cities. These organizations often face unique challenges depending on the political, historical, and community context. This section seeks to offer insight on three different urban contexts, as well as the practical solutions that range from policy responses to community organizing, all aimed at fostering a supportive social infrastructure that is vital for both the wellbeing of urban Indigenous communities and the overall health and inclusivity of urban environments.

### Case Study 1: Newcastle, Australia – Enabling Indigenous Service Delivery

**Context:** In urban centres around Australia, Aboriginal community-based organizations (CBOs) have played a distinctive role in society in relation to urban Aboriginal peoples and their rights to self-determination and community development. Aboriginal CBOs have relied on government funding to build Aboriginal social infrastructure and deliver programs and services to local Aboriginal peoples. Similar to their counterparts in Canada, Aboriginal CBOs operate in a system of layered governance, navigating their way around the complexity of local, state, and federal grants and funding modalities.

**The Problem:** When analyzing the funding terrain that supports the delivery of social and material benefits, Howard-Wagner found that local and state government support for Aboriginal community development in Newcastle was ad hoc and often personality driven.<sup>35</sup> Aboriginal organizations had been dependent favourable government policy and funding environments to build critical Aboriginal social infrastructure, engage in broader community social development and create social change in the City.

**Policy Approach:** The political landscape become more complex as Australia progressively rolled out a new social service market based on New Public Management principles, where reforms in public administration of social services have centred around the market enablement of social service delivery. Notably, neoliberal scholars, Mitchell Dean, have described the shift towards market enablement as “government creating markets where markets did not formerly exist.”<sup>36</sup> Under this prevailing context, this means that urban Aboriginal CBOs now operate in a highly regulated, compliance-driven, competitive mainstream market – whereby, they are competing

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<sup>35</sup> Howard-Wagner, D. (2018). “Moving from Transactional Government to Enablement”.

<sup>36</sup> Dean, M. (2004). *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*.

with mainstream corporations and national not-for-profits for access to limited government funding to deliver programs and services to urban Aboriginal peoples.

While the efficacy of market enablement has been debated amongst public policy scholars<sup>37</sup>, Howard-Wagner advocates for a model of community enablement – whereby agreement making, such as a local treaty or accord. A model of Indigenous community enablement that is being piloted in New South Wales is known as OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment) plan. Local Decision Making (LDM) is one of eight initiatives under OCHRE, where its purpose is to give Aboriginal community-based regional decision-making groups (regional alliances) an increased say in government service delivery.<sup>38</sup>

The intent of the OCHRE Local Decision Making is for Aboriginal CBOs to form an alliance in a particular locality or region. The regional alliance, along with the New South Wales Government, then enter into a negotiated Accord (agreement) as a path to self-governance. This is achieved by defining the relationship between the local or regional alliance and government through:

1. Creating greater levels of accountability in terms of where government funding is being spent and on what
2. Ensuring more control of services at the local and/or regional level
3. Linking government investment in terms of community objectives and needs
4. Producing an approach in which responsibility is shared between communities and governments

Founded in 2015, The Barang Regional Alliance is the representative body of the Aboriginal community on Darkinjung Country on the Central Coast of New South Wales.<sup>39</sup> This regional alliance is comprised of the cultural authority on Darkinjung Country: Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council, and six other Aboriginal led service delivery organizations. Through the Local Decision-Making accord process, Barang and opt-in organizations collectively negotiated for a variety of outcomes for the local community. Of these, included funding, implementation, and delivery of an Aboriginal Youth and Community Navigator Project.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Helmsing, A.B. (2004a) 'Local governance hybrids'; Craig, D.A & Porter, D. (2006) Development beyond neoliberalism?

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/aboriginal-affairs-nsw/about-ochre/local-decision-making#:~:text=Local%20Decision%20Making-,What%20is%20Local%20Decision%20Making%3F,are%20delivered%20in%20their%20communities.>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.barang.org.au/what-we-do/our-purpose>

<sup>40</sup> <https://centralcoastclc.org.au/aboriginal-youth-community-navigators/>

Accords – or agreements, are likened to promises for the NSW government and Aboriginal Regional alliances to work on important issues together and to deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities. To enable accord negotiations to commence, regional alliances must submit a statement of claim to Aboriginal Affairs outlining the priority issues for their community and the actions they would like to address within the accord. After extensive community and stakeholder engagement, Barang coalesced community feedback and input into the idea of a network of community hubs and empowerment of Aboriginal Youth.

Howard-Wegner & Harrington in their evaluation of Barang Accord negotiation found that the idea of community hubs is not just about focus service delivery, but rather a model of care and reform journeys.<sup>41</sup> Through Barang, opt-in Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organizations see themselves as working together for the Aboriginal community rather than just their own members. Regional Alliance like Barang plays a vital role to broker procurement of funds with the state and provide a range of new wrap-around services to empower Aboriginal Youth. For example, Barang has brokered funding for Mingaletta, a long-standing, but poorly funded, Aboriginal community hub and safe place for Aboriginal people in Umina, New South Wales.<sup>42</sup> Mingaletta is a space for Aboriginal service providers, including health professionals and legal services, to provide outreach services to Aboriginal people living on the Peninsula.

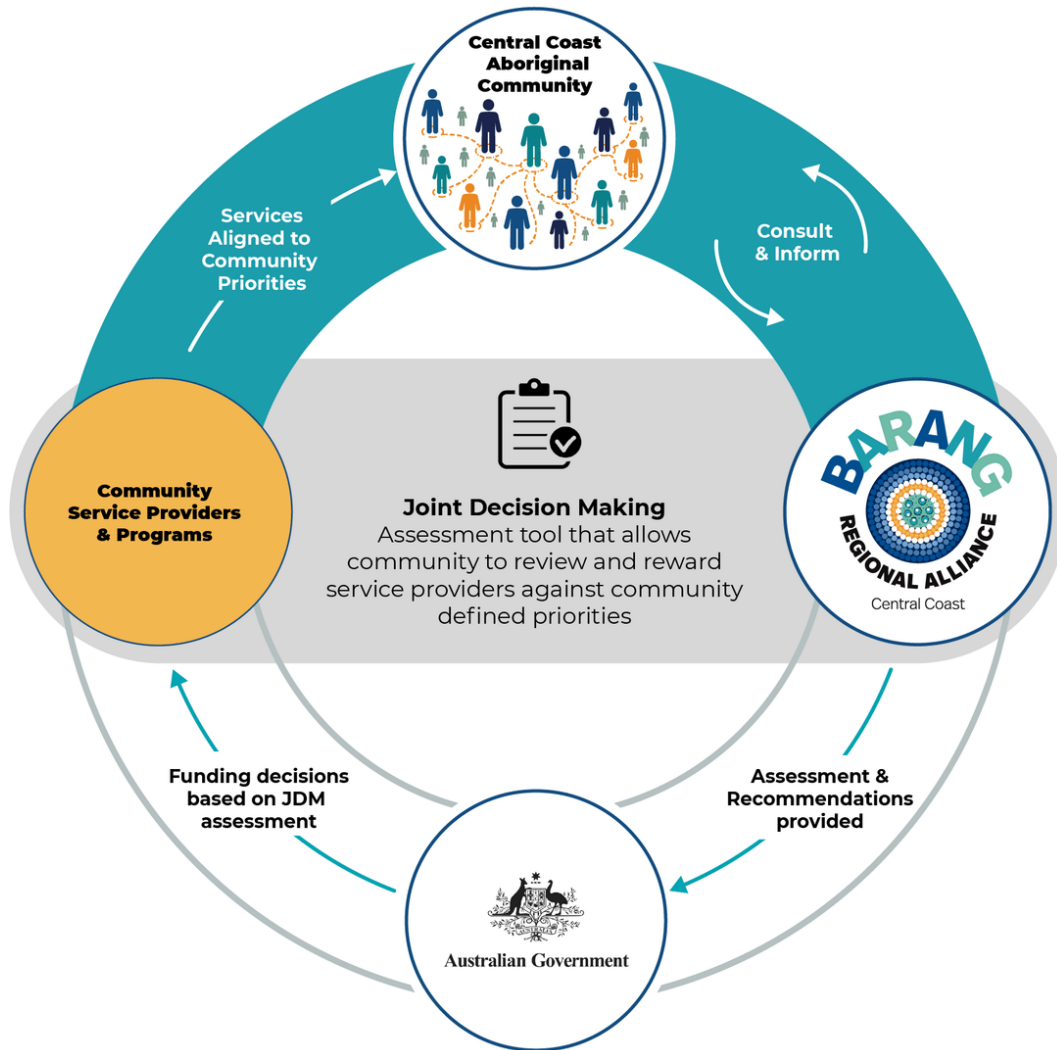
Despite the steps toward promoting self-determination of regional alliances in addressing local and regional Aboriginal priorities, Howard-Wegner & Harrington found that other NSW government policies obstructed the negotiation of accord and the reform goals of LDM.<sup>43</sup> Namely, the procurement policy limited the amount of funding that could be allocated, as funding exceeding the amount allowable under the State's Aboriginal Procurement Policy would require an open tender process, effectively putting Barang in competition with other, non-Aboriginal organizations to implement service delivery.

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<sup>41</sup> Howard-Wagner, D. & Morgan, H. (2022). OCHRE Local Decision Making Stage 2 Accords Negotiation: Barang Accord Negotiation Evaluation Report.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 4:** Indigenous Service Delivery Ecosystem in New South Wales, Australia<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.barang.org.au/what-we-do/key-projects>

## Case Study 2: Native Canadian Centre of Toronto

**Background:** The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT) is Toronto's oldest Indigenous community institution and enterprise – one of the original Friendship Centres in Canada. The Centre began as a meeting place and cultural centre for First Nations peoples relocating to the city.<sup>45</sup> As time evolved, the centre became a metaphorical town-square of the community<sup>46</sup>, where its first programs were directed at cultural resurgence in the city – providing social, recreational, cultural, and spiritual services.

The Centre, as it stands today, is the outcome of years of work by dedicated individuals to creating this meeting place for Aboriginal people in Toronto. The Centre evolved from The North American Indian club – who was originally founded to bring together Indigenous people in the city and eliminate feelings of isolation during a time when most jobs available to Aboriginal people were in factory or private residence work. In the 1950s, the club first operated from the YMCA at Yonge and College Street, eventually going on to become incorporated in 1962.<sup>47</sup>

Over the years, the centre went through several spaces, moving each time as it outgrows its previous location. In 1975, the Centre, along with Wigwamen Housing Corporation, purchased the Toronto Bible College as a joint venture in the heart of Toronto. When the centre was first opened, Wigwamen Housing also opened a 120-unit Native Seniors complex on the property.<sup>48</sup>

**Community Entrepreneurships:** Through an extensive cross-jurisdictional analysis of urban Indigenous history, Howard-Wagner argues the creation of Indigenous community organizations have been central to community development and Indigenous resurgence as they provide a pathway to economic empowerment for Indigenous people living in cities.<sup>49</sup> As one of their core offerings, the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto offers a program called the Indigenous Marketplace, which is a community economic development initiative that pairs small business and entrepreneurial training, growth supports, and infrastructure with the intent of building a stronger, more diversified Indigenous economic presence in Toronto.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Obonsawin R, Howard-Bobiwash H (1997) The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto: The meeting place for Aboriginal people for 35 years.

<sup>46</sup> Howard, H A (2004). Dreamcatchers in the City: An Ethnohistory of Social Action, Gender and Class in Native Community Production in Toronto.

<sup>47</sup> Sanderson, F. & Howard-Bobiwash, H (1997). The Meeting Place: Aboriginal Life in Toronto.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Howard- Wagner, D. (2021). Indigenous Invisibility in the City.

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.ncct.on.ca/post/indigenous-artisan-marketplace>

Since 2018, the program has supported 80+ Canadian Indigenous businesses and has also established an online directory of the Canadian Indigenous Artisans and an Indigenous Artisan Marketplace.<sup>51</sup> In urban landscapes where Indigeneity has been displaced and segregated, First Nations organizations have been described as communal social structures and the social fabric to uplift entrepreneurship. In a more concrete way, Indigenous entrepreneurship are often to be anchored in the community, implicitly advancing Indigenous community interests and serving as a catalyst for social transformation. Taspell & Woods further noted that social entrepreneurship in Indigenous context often seeks to create something of value that is congruent with the social cause and the social community.<sup>52</sup>



**Figure 5:** 2022 Indigenous Artisan Market, City News Toronto<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.ncct.on.ca/post/indigenous-artisan-marketplace>

<sup>52</sup> Taspell, W. & Woods, C. (2010). Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation: Self-Organization in an Indigenous Context

<sup>53</sup> <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2022/11/25/toronto-marketplace-showcases-indigenous-artisans-from-across-canada/>



### Case Study 3: - iitaohkanitsini'kotsiiyo'p – Indigenous Hub, Calgary

**Background:** The Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary operates iitaohkanitsini'kotsiiyo'p – a place for conversation, to host access for wellness, belonging, kinship and safety. The Hub provides supports and services in seven areas: Language and Cultural Programming, Education and Training, Employment Services, Health Services, Women's Health and Wellbeing Services/Youth Programming, Crime Prevention and Community Reintegration Program, and Community Navigator to combat the Opioid Epidemic.<sup>54</sup>

Prior the AFCC inception in 2004, there was an active friendship Centre in Calgary, but it closed its doors and was no longer operational in 2000. The dissolving of the AFCC in 2000 left a gap in the Indigenous community of Calgary and prompted a number of community members to revive the much-needed organization in 2004. Since 2004, the AFCC has reformed and grown exponentially to provide programs and services to the Indigenous community in Calgary.<sup>55</sup>



**Figure 6:** iitaohkanitsini'kotsiiyo'p Hub Naming Ceremony

To determine the impact of the Friendship Centre on the lives of Indigenous peoples in Calgary's urban centres, Lindstrom & Bouvier<sup>56</sup> undertook an evaluation exercise in collaboration with the staff, clients, and adjacent networks to highlight the successes, challenges, and stories from this urban hub. In this exercise, the authors chose to conceptualize impacts of service provisioning in terms of "gifts" to highlight the relational aspect of working with urban Indigenous communities.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.afccalgary.org/>

<sup>55</sup> Lindstrom, G. & Bouvier, A. (2020). iitaohkanitsini'kotsiiyo'p Indigenous Hub Evaluation: Phases 1 & 2

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

### **Physical Space – A Calgary Police Gift**

The iitaohkanitsini'kotsiiyio'p was established in July of 2018 in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report to create a centralized location, in downtown Calgary, that provides wholistic services and programs to Indigenous people in Calgary. The Indigenous Hub operates through the generous contributions of United Way, the City of Calgary, and Calgary Police Services.<sup>57</sup>

The facility currently housing the Hub, is a donation by the Calgary Police Services (CPS) of its ground floor office in Downtown Calgary as it continues to maintain the operating floors above. Although the location is centralized and easily accessible for clients from all walks of life, there are physical limitations where the site lacks proper facilities like limited kitchen capacity and washroom accessibility that makes the delivery of programming a challenge. Because police officers are using the same bathrooms and safety concerns related to CPS's continuing operation, clients need to be accompanied to and from the bathroom by staff. This was acknowledged as an impediment of client's privacy and sense of freedom in accessing the space, further complicating the emotional stress from accessing a space with a deep-rooted affiliation to policing violence and systemic anti-Indigenous racism. The lack of kitchen capacity in a space that was not intended for a community convening use was further highlighted to be a limitation of the space.

### **Gifts to the Clients – Cultural Programming**

In the talking circles held with the clients at the hub, Lindstrom & Bouvier found that cultural programming offer a vital connection to culture and foster positive connections to Indigenous identity.<sup>58</sup> In particular, access to Elder teachings and ceremony provide spiritual grounding, and the variety of cultural activities offer a linkage to Indigenous ways of knowing and being within an urban context – a context that is not easily navigable by many members of the urban Indigenous population. In evaluating the culture program and services it became clear that cultural teachings can bridge the gap between cultural isolation/alienation in an urban context and prevent Indigenous culture from being misinterpreted.

Throughout the talking circle with clients, it was also mentioned many times over that the location made it ideal and combined with the wrap-around services, made it a first-choice locale for clients to gather. Moreover, the co-located nature service provision was seen as a central feature of the Hub and determined the level of impact of the Hub within the Indigenous

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

community in Calgary. Having the ability to access services and programs in one location is integral for an individual to feel a sense of connection and belonging and to feel at “home.”

### **Gifts to the Staff – Wrap-Around Services**

The design of wrap-around services has been cited as an essential design to promote the health and well-being of Indigenous people in the city under an integrated service delivery approach. Having the capacity for staff to support each other’s roles and to have clients able to access services and programs in one location is an integral component to the success of the Hub. Clients are easily referred to other programs and services and relationships and more easily and readily established and maintained with the people and operations being co-located in the same space.

The wrap-around services enable the staff at the Hub to draw on a variety of interconnected services that not only ensures clients are receiving necessary supports at the right time and in the most effective way, but also that the staff themselves are also feeling supported given that if they do not have the relevant resources for clients, they are able to refer them to resources that can respond more effectively in that moment.

The benefits of this service delivery approach are that it responds to the complex needs of clients since many are experiencing a combination of barriers that require a holistic model of care that not only attends to basic needs but is premised within Indigenous cultural values of truth, direct experience, humility, wisdom and inspiring clients. At the core of this co-location approach is the recognition that there is fluidity of movement between the services and the interconnected nature of services acts as a mechanism of support for staff across different organizations.

### **Gifts to Partner Stakeholders and Urban Community - Cross-Cultural Connection**

The interconnected nature of service pathways that constitute the programs and services framework of the Hub enabled a variety of benefits to be felt by not only the collaborative partnership arrangements that underlie the overall organizational structure of the Hub, but also the broader community.

In terms of the gifts offered to the larger urban community, the Hub is really on its way to being considered a staple in the downtown core where people from all walks of life can gather to access services, connect with Indigenous culture, or simply create relationships. In addition to the many different First Nations and Indigenous communities who gather in the space, non-Indigenous people in need, whether they be clients or from other service agencies, also access the space for essential services. Opportunities for cross-cultural learning are optimized and many of the Hub staff often find themselves dispelling myths and commonly held stereotypes that are a constant barrier to good relations

## RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

Space and service-delivery has been a central avenue for urban Indigenous collectives to express their claims and agency in cities. When supporting urban Indigenous service delivery organization in locating a space for community building and programming, the City in turn is uplifting community connections and gatherings as Indigenous communities of association build their own institutions, social infrastructure, social economies, and urban governance through time. This is working towards reconciliation – advancing the commitment to generational change, healing, and empowering the urban Indigenous collective to cultivate power and capacity over the years to come.

Upon the review of existing literature, case studies and interviews with key informants, the following recommendations emerged as opportunities for the City to continue its commitment to better enable urban Indigenous space and service delivery. These recommendations, together, call for a multifaceted approach that combines immediate actions with long-term strategic planning.

1. **Facilitate the self-determination of urban Indigenous priorities:** An important avenue for the City to uphold and affirm human rights of urban Indigenous communities is to operationalize principles of self-determination in the process of identifying and securing community spaces. The concept of self-determination is rooted in authentic and meaningful relationship, where urban Indigenous voices are present and respected during decision-making processes that affects the community.

While there is an existing governance structure in Vancouver like MVAEC which has a working relationship with the City, the practical reality of who needs to be at the planning table requires further internal and key informant interviews to be determined. Guidance should be sought from the City's Indigenous Relations office to ensure collaboration through identifying key partners rather than inducing conflict in the community.

A tangible first step for City staff to facilitate urban Indigenous self-determination is to first ensure internal consistency across policies and processes that are involved to pair urban Indigenous organizations with corresponding spaces. In the New South Wales case study discussed on page 26 of this report, internal inconsistency emerged when procurement guidelines for open tender prevented the initial policy objective to equitably distribute funds for the local urban Indigenous organizations.

Mapping out bureaucratic barriers and proactively working to resolve such challenges are necessary steps to cultivate trusts—and respect with urban Indigenous organizations—grounded in the spirit of transparency and allyship.

2. **Support co-location of urban Indigenous service delivery organizations:** To date, co-location of urban Indigenous service delivery organizations in close proximity has been essential in cultivating community, resiliency, and mutual support for Indigenous communities living in urban spaces from diverse backgrounds.

The two case studies on urban Indigenous space in Calgary and Toronto demonstrate physical proximity of service delivery enables timely, appropriate service experience for the clients, as well as information sharing amongst service providers. Given that urban centres in Canada have had a long history of alienating Indigeneity through both the legacy of colonization and related market pressures, co-location of urban Indigenous social infrastructure is an approach that will enable urban Indigenous community building for the years to come. To move beyond the current project-by-project space allocation approach, coordinated planning will ensure that Indigenous-led and-serving spaces and services across Vancouver are suitable and complementary with each other to meet community needs. Considerations to planning for complimentary needs and cultivating community resiliency is co-locating services through the holistic health lens as outlined on page 15 of this report.

3. **Improve city processes for social change:** Enhance city processes and efficiencies by systematically prioritizing urban Indigenous social infrastructure within the space matching program. This should account for an intersectional lens, such as the unique priorities of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, and an equity-oriented approach that recognizes varying degrees of vulnerability.

The lens of intersectionality encourages practitioners to see how there are multiple domains of action available in addressing complex social issues, such that nuances within a group experience is disaggregated. In this case, existing research and reports pinpoint a clear need for cities to understand the reality, challenges and aspirations of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals living in urban centres. Indigenous women face life-threatening, gender-based violence, and disproportionately experience violent crimes because of systemic racism.

The space-matching program as part of the *Spaces to Thrive* policy offers the opportunity to connect underused spaces and ensure that social and community-serving organizations have access to suitable facilities. When integrating an equity and reconciliation lens to this work program, this process of space optimization has the potential to intervene in the root causes of Indigenous social, economic and health disparities that is interconnected to experiences of social isolation, the lack of culturally safe services in the city.

4. **Incentivize and prioritize Indigenous service delivery:** This report calls upon the City to ensure that urban Indigenous priorities are implemented when making decisions about investment, partnerships, and space matching.

Overall, the review of existing research and case studies demonstrates that community entrepreneurship programs are often anchored in the community and serve as a catalyst for social and economic empowerment in cities. Thus, space is a vital foundation for service delivery organizations to run incubator programming for Indigenous entrepreneurship and creating a platform for Indigenous businesses to grow their clientele.

While scope of the space matching program is most likely to be focused on supporting a tenant that runs this community entrepreneurship incubator program, it's worthwhile to note the importance of space for many up-and-coming small businesses. In 2023, City Council approved a pilot Development Potential Relief program to provide tax relief to independent, small businesses, and community partners who are paying disproportionately high taxes given their increased assessment value due to the site's development potential. Considering this context, collaborating with other internal teams to identify possible support for BIPOC small businesses could be a pathway for the City to support the long-term success of community entrepreneurship service delivery.

5. **Implement systematic reporting of space use and impact:** Monitoring and evaluating the impact of a policy is foundational to ensuring accountability, as it holds policymakers and implementers responsible for the outcomes and builds trust with stakeholders who have engaged in the plan-making.

In addition to curating specific indicators that would reflect the impact of space use and *Spaces to Thrive*, exploring a systematic reporting mechanism for space use and impact under existing council-approved policy framework offers a mechanism to show the upstream impact of space use.

For instance, the forthcoming refresh of the *Healthy City Strategy* seeks to monitor and track indicators that measure health inequities that is both defined by the community and is essential to service delivery planning. Indicators for space use, therefore, have the potential to operationalize the ongoing efforts in addressing higher level policy directions for reconciliation and anti-racism.

While the growth of social infrastructure in Vancouver currently has a report-back section in the ACCS Annual Grant Report under the section “Leases as Grants”, the quantitative nature of existing indicators like Gross Floor Area and the Number of Operator falls short of capturing the cascading impact of what securing long-term spaces means in an increasingly unaffordable city like Vancouver. Storytelling evaluation, or qualitative evaluation in general, offers an opportunity to provide evidence and experience-based input on future policy development.

Currently, cascading impacts are being reported and monitored upon through grant and partner reporting mechanisms, which mainly support organizations to offer programming. Extending this approach to conceptualize leases as grants reporting would tell a more complete story when reporting on spaces and programs, rather than having space and what happens within a space as separate evaluation.

The function of storytelling not only bridges high-level policy objectives to the development outcome at a specific address, this evaluation method can also illuminate the human-scaled experience of a space, such that policymakers and plan implementers can iteratively define desired outcomes and policy. This process of monitoring and evaluation in many ways mimics the planning process, yet resources are often hard to advocate for when it comes to closing the loop of this initial visioning process.

As the City continues to its journey toward reconciliation, systematic reporting also offers an evidence-based method to disseminate with other cities on how to develop policies pertaining to their respective urban Indigenous spaces and service delivery context. This contribution towards organizational learning and knowledge sharing across different jurisdictions is another way to inspire rippling effects of decolonizing change.

In conclusion, these aforementioned recommendations aim to help the City better support urban Indigenous non-profit organizations in delivering the essential services they provide. Additionally, they advocate for the City to adopt a systematic and coordinated approach in addressing key issues related to the diverse urban Indigenous communities who now call Vancouver home. As cities continue to grow and diversify, it is imperative that the needs of urban Indigenous communities are prioritized and addressed through collaborative and sustained efforts. Through these strategies, cities can begin to support space needs of urban Indigenous service delivery organizations and ensure their continuing impact within the communities they serve.



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