

Accessibility, Trust and Support in Situations of Intimate Partner Violence:

The Pivotal Role of Native Friendship Centres

Position paper tabled regarding Bill 4

Act respecting the communication of information for the purpose of protecting against intimate partner violence, and amending various legislative provisions

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The Native Friendship Centre Movement

The Quebec Native Friendship Centre Movement constitutes the largest urban service network for Indigenous people. Its core mission is to drive wide-reaching social change, led by and for Indigenous people in urban areas, and its actions thereby support their social, community, economic and cultural development. The Movement is made up of affiliated Native Friendship Centres, the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ), the Société immobilière du Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (SIRCAAQ) and the RCAAQ early childcare centre (CPE).

The Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec

Since 1976, the RCAAQ has served as the provincial association of Native Friendship Centres. It has been advocating for the rights and interests of First Nations and Inuit in Quebec's cities, while actively supporting member Native Friendship Centres. The RCAAQ is a key partner for public authorities on urban Indigenous issues and a central player for ensuring equity in service delivery to Indigenous people in cities. While supporting and contributing to the development of concrete solutions and public policies, the RCAAQ strives to better document the presence, needs and realities of urban Indigenous people through consultations, research and evaluations. The RCAAQ supports each Centre and service point in their daily operations and interactions with local partners. Native Friendship Centres nonetheless maintain full autonomy in their actions, reflecting their distinct local realities.

SIRCAAQ and community living environments

By founding the Société immobilière du Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones (SIRCAAQ) in 2019, the RCAAQ began its project to make housing more accessible to Indigenous people living in cities. The SIRCAAQ is responsible for developing residential living environments specifically designed to support Indigenous students (First Nations and Inuit) living in urban areas. These environments offer far more than housing; they are true community spaces that are safe, culturally relevant and thoughtfully designed to foster academic success, family wellness and cultural anchoring.

RCAAQ early childcare centre

In 2024, the RCAAQ established an early childcare centre (CPE) to support Indigenous families in urban settings. The RCAAQ's CPE carries out an educational, social, community and cultural mission that places the child and their family at the heart of a caring environment rooted in Indigenous cultures. This new institution also plays a strategic role in the development of future facilities to sustainably meet the needs of Indigenous families and help them thrive in Quebec cities.

The Native Friendship Centres

In Quebec, 11 Native Friendship Centres and 3 community service points, brought together under the RCAAQ banner, are present in 14 cities that account for nearly one third of the urban Indigenous population in the province. Rooted in the communities they serve, these organizations carry out social, community and civic mandates and welcome Indigenous people of all nations, all genders and all ages. By offering a range of integrated and interconnected services, these Centres provide a culturally safe and relevant environment, making them crucial hubs for frontline services. They play a pivotal role in enhancing quality of life for urban Indigenous residents, promoting Indigenous cultures and bridging gaps between different communities.

These Centres embody the founding principles of cultural safety. They constitute Indigenous spaces of cooperation and democratic deliberation; their collegial and participatory organizational culture emphasizes agency and innovation; and all of their actions are guided by a commitment to sharing and a common goal of collective wellness. They play an essential role in supporting families by offering services rooted in recognized expertise in intimate partner and family violence. Their work is based on a profound understanding of the realities experienced by Indigenous people and on culturally safe, holistic methods.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Officially recognize Native Friendship Centres as designated organizations within the regulatory framework.

Recommendation 2:

Formally integrate Friendship Centres into the mechanism set out in sections 7 *et seq.*

Recommendation 3:

Guarantee culturally safe support, including tailored approaches and access to services in Indigenous languages.

Recommendation 4:

Adapt the implementation of the Bill to the realities of First Nations, Inuit and urban Indigenous populations.

Recommendation 5:

Ensure adequate and recurring funding to support the implementation of the assigned duties.

Realities of First Nations and Inuit in urban areas

In Quebec, the Indigenous population displays sociodemographic characteristics that are distinct from those of the general population: individuals are younger on average, families are often larger and the population is significantly more mobile than the non-Indigenous population.¹ Among Indigenous people, mobility between communities and urban centres is both high and incredibly diverse. Although the majority of Indigenous people in Quebec live in cities (64.1%),² research has shown that the Indigenous presence in Quebec's urban centres extends well beyond the number of people who officially reside there.³ Many Indigenous people in urban settings are experiencing housing instability, are passing through or are living there temporarily for various reasons, including to access health care, for education, to flee situations of violence and due to involvement with the justice system.⁴

In recent years, numerous studies have documented the particularly high prevalence of intimate partner and family violence among Indigenous populations. While these forms of violence affect the population as a whole, they manifest disproportionately among Indigenous people due to historical, social and systemic factors—notably the persistent effects of colonization, systemic racism and socioeconomic inequalities—which amplify their impacts. These realities affect Indigenous women and gender-diverse or 2SLGBTQI+ Indigenous individuals to an even greater degree.

The resulting findings are particularly concerning:

- While Indigenous women make up less than 5% of the female population in Canada, they account for roughly one in five femicides, revealing a starkly disproportionate rate of violence.⁵
- Over 6 in 10 Indigenous women (63%) have been physically or sexually assaulted in their lifetime, an alarming statistic that points to ongoing systemic failures.⁶
- Indigenous women are at a heightened risk for intimate partner violence and experience more frequent and more severe forms of abuse than non-Indigenous women.⁷

¹ Lévesque, C., Gagnon, M., Desbiens, C., Apparicio, P., Cloutier, E., & Sirois, T. (2019). *Profil démographique de la population des Premières Nations et du Peuple Inuit dans les villes du Québec, 2001 à 2016 (No. 2019-03)*. Alliance de recherche ODENA, DIALOG Network, & Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec.

² Gagnon, M., Radu, I., & Lévesque, C. (2023). *Profil démographique de la population des Premières Nations et du Peuple Inuit dans les villes du Québec, 2001 à 2021*. Alliance de recherche ODENA, DIALOG Network, & Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec, Institut national de la recherche scientifique.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Lévesque, C. (2016). *La présence autochtone dans les villes du Québec : tendances, enjeux et actions* (Cahier ODENA No. 2016-01). Montréal: Alliance de recherche ODENA, DIALOG Network, & the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec. Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec. (2024). *Indigenous people facing justice and public security: Overview of urban issues in Quebec*.

⁵ Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. (2025). *Infographic 2025: Femicide in Canada*.

⁶ Statistics Canada. (2022). Violent victimization and perceptions of safety: Experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in Canada. *Juristat* 85-002-X.

⁷ Sinha, M. (2013). *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends*. Statistics Canada. O'Donnell, V., & Wallace, S. (2011). *First Nations, Métis and Inuit women*. Statistics Canada.

In urban areas, these realities unfold within a context of compounding vulnerabilities. Recent data from a survey conducted by the RCAAQ in 2025⁸ highlight an accumulation of structural and systemic challenges:

- 29% of respondents have been in the Quebec justice system as a defendant or an offender.
- 23% of respondents who have had dealings with the Quebec justice system have been detained in a correctional facility.
- 64% of respondents reported they had experienced racism or discrimination at some point in their lives.
- 43% of gender-diverse and 2SLGBTQI+ Indigenous individuals have experienced intimate partner or family violence in their lifetime.
- 44% of gender-diverse and 2SLGBTQI+ Indigenous individuals have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.
- 32% of Indigenous women have experienced intimate partner or family violence in their lifetime.
- 19% of Indigenous women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.

These realities undermine trust in public institutions and create major barriers to seeking help. In practice, they result in persistent obstacles to accessing services: More than one in two Indigenous people (56%) report encountering barriers when trying to access the resources needed to meet their needs.⁹ Despite the efforts of various players, these data illustrate that substantial improvements remain necessary to guarantee equitable, safe and tailored access to services.

The underreporting of violent situations and the limited use of available remedies remain significant issues. Mistrust of institutions, fuelled by historical and contemporary experiences of discrimination, deters individuals from coming forward and limits their access to protection and justice mechanisms. In this regard, Native Friendship Centres play an essential role. By offering services rooted in culturally safe approaches, they support Indigenous people in understanding and exercising their rights, while providing concrete solutions to break cycles of vulnerability.

Culturally safe support means more than merely adapting services; it is grounded in a recognition of the historical and contemporary realities experienced by Indigenous people, as well as in practices that remain attentive to their identities, knowledge and life journeys. It requires shifting power dynamics between institutions and individuals, promoting holistic and community-based approaches, and integrating cultural, spiritual and relational dimensions into the support process. Mechanisms based on formal accusations, legal recourse through judicial institutions and reliance on the system can create friction with realities shaped by institutional mistrust and more collective models of conflict resolution and safety management. In the absence of cultural adaptation and direct involvement by Indigenous communities, these tools risk remaining partially disconnected from the realities they are intended to protect.

Against this backdrop, Native Friendship Centres position themselves as trusted environments that facilitate access to rights, justice and health and social services. Their approach not only meets immediate needs but also supports long-term healing processes, helping to break cycles of violence, marginalization and institutional mistrust. Through their work at the individual, family and community levels, these environments foster healing, violence prevention and collective capacity building. They thus represent indispensable catalysts for improving access to services and driving sustainable change.

The Native Friendship Centres: Expertise already aligned with the objectives of the Bill

A mission in keeping with the spirit of the law

By enabling individuals to obtain information needed to assess the potential risk posed by an intimate partner, this law focuses on prevention, protection and safety—principles that directly align with the mission of Native Friendship Centres. The Centres work to improve quality of life for urban Indigenous populations, particularly by promoting their safety and well-being. Using an inclusive approach, the Native Friendship Centres apply an open-door policy, regardless of nation or place of residence, to welcome all First Nations people and Inuit seeking support, guidance and solidarity. Thus, the law and the Friendship Centres share the common vision of creating safer living environments where individuals can thrive free from violence.

Organizations equipped to fulfill the duties provided for by law

Native Friendship Centres serve as frontline actors in prevention, safety and wellness within urban areas. Through their mission and practices, they already have the capacity needed to assume the duties entrusted to designated organizations under this Bill.

Indeed, Friendship Centres play a pivotal role in supporting Indigenous people by offering a comprehensive range of services tailored to their realities. They serve simultaneously as welcoming spaces, community support networks and hubs

⁸ The data were collected from a sample of 2,003 Indigenous respondents surveyed between July 2024 and March 2025. The full methodology and results will be published soon.

⁹ Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (2026). *Indigenous people and access to services in urban areas: A provincial overview*. Forthcoming.

for psychosocial intervention, positioning them uniquely to support individuals at risk.

Within the framework established by the law, they are equipped to do the following:

- Meet with individuals at risk in a safe, trusted environment
- Communicate transmitted information in a clear, secure and contextualized manner
- Support informed decision-making
- Guide the development of safety plans tailored to the situation
- Refer individuals to specialized resources and facilitate access to them

Friendship Centres are further distinguished by their expertise in providing comprehensive support. Their holistic approach accounts for intersectional realities, the impacts of intergenerational trauma and the historical context specific to Indigenous people. They offer safe, respectful and judgment-free spaces, fostering an environment conducive to receiving sensitive information and making informed decisions.

Furthermore, their deep roots within urban communities enable them to ensure a continuity of support before, during and after information is given. Their nuanced understanding of local realities and available resources allows them to tailor their interventions to the specific needs of each individual and to propose relevant, realistic safety measures.

Finally, Friendship Centres are equipped to provide support in an Indigenous language when necessary, encouraging full understanding of the communicated information and strengthening a person's ability to accurately gauge their risk exposure.

In short, Native Friendship Centres possess the expertise, practices and intervention frameworks required to act as designated organizations, in alignment with the protective, preventive and safety objectives pursued by this Bill.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Officially recognize Native Friendship Centres as designated organizations within the regulatory framework.

Limitations of the Bill for Indigenous populations

The need for explicit recognition of urban Indigenous organizations

The Bill must explicitly include urban Indigenous organizations within the definition of designated organizations in its implementing regulations. In this regard, Native Friendship Centres are vital players. They are embedded within urban environments and have recognized expertise in supporting Indigenous populations, particularly in the areas of healthcare, social services and violence prevention.

As previously mentioned, these organizations are already positioned to put the Bill's objectives into practice, thanks to their culturally safe approaches and strong community foothold. Without explicit recognition, there is a real risk that their role will be marginalized or left dependent on shifting administrative interpretations. Such an outcome would limit the scope of the Bill and undermine its effectiveness among urban Indigenous populations.

A clear and formal designation of Friendship Centres would not only recognize their contribution but also ensure that the mechanisms provided for by law are accessible from within trusted environments already utilized by the individuals concerned.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Formally integrate Friendship Centres into the mechanism set out in sections 7 *et seq.*

Risk of inaccessibility if there are no trusted intermediaries

Although the Bill aims to increase access to information and protective mechanisms, it carries a risk of being inaccessible to Indigenous populations if it fails to explicitly account for the role of trusted intermediaries. Barriers to access—whether linguistic, cultural, administrative or rooted in mistrust of public institutions—remain significant.

This finding is particularly concerning given that more than half of the Indigenous population in Quebec resides in urban

areas, where isolation and service fragmentation can be further amplified. Furthermore, available data demonstrate a stark overrepresentation of Indigenous people in situations of intimate partner and family violence, as well as in cases of femicide. These combined factors increase the need for support, while also compounding the complexity of accessing existing resources.

Thus, the absence of explicit mechanisms enabling the involvement of Indigenous community organizations could severely limit the scope of the Bill. It is therefore vital to establish conditions that facilitate receiving support from culturally safe resources that are capable of building trust and guiding individuals through every step of the process.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Guarantee culturally safe support, including tailored approaches and access to services in Indigenous languages.

The need for adaptability and flexibility in implementation frameworks

Finally, the implementation of the Bill must imperatively take into account the organizational and community realities unique to urban Indigenous environments. Even when Indigenous organizations are formally recognized or designated within programs or legislative frameworks, the administrative and operational procedures that accompany this recognition are often overly restrictive.

Rigid requirements, restrictive eligibility criteria or poorly adapted accountability mechanisms can effectively limit these organizations' capacity to act, or even de facto exclude them from the established mechanisms. This creates a gap between theoretical recognition and actual operational capacity on the ground.

Therefore, to make the Bill fully effective and equitable, it is necessary to build flexibility into its terms of application. This flexibility must allow for adaptation to local realities, organizational capacities and the culturally anchored approaches of urban Indigenous organizations.

Such an approach would send a clear signal that the government is willing to move beyond symbolic recognition and to offer concrete conditions that enable Indigenous organizations to fully carry out their role in implementing the law.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Adapt the implementation of the Bill to the realities of First Nations, Inuit and urban Indigenous populations.

Recognition to be backed by sufficient resources

Native Friendship Centres are designated organizations and vital players in supporting urban Indigenous populations. They very often represent the primary—if not the only—gateway to services. Without their involvement, a significant proportion of Indigenous people risk missing out on the services provided.

In this context, recognizing the expertise of Native Friendship Centres must imperatively be accompanied by appropriate, predictable and recurring funding. Even if the regulations provide for their recognition as designated organizations, this remains lip service if they do not receive the resources needed for implementation.

Friendship Centres are already heavily called upon to collaborate, support and refer individuals whenever an Indigenous person is involved. These interventions represent a real and substantial workload for their teams. Without additional resources, this responsibility risks further overburdening organizations that are already deeply mobilized within the communities they serve, thereby limiting their capacity to fully assume the roles entrusted to them.

Furthermore, this workload carries a significant human dimension. Interveners must cope with sustained emotional and psychological strain, which requires tailored support mechanisms, including spaces for recharging and healing.

Therefore, in order for recognition in the regulations to yield concrete and lasting results, it must be backed by the necessary resources. Formally recognizing Native Friendship Centres as designated organizations must go hand in hand with funding commensurate with the responsibilities entrusted to them.

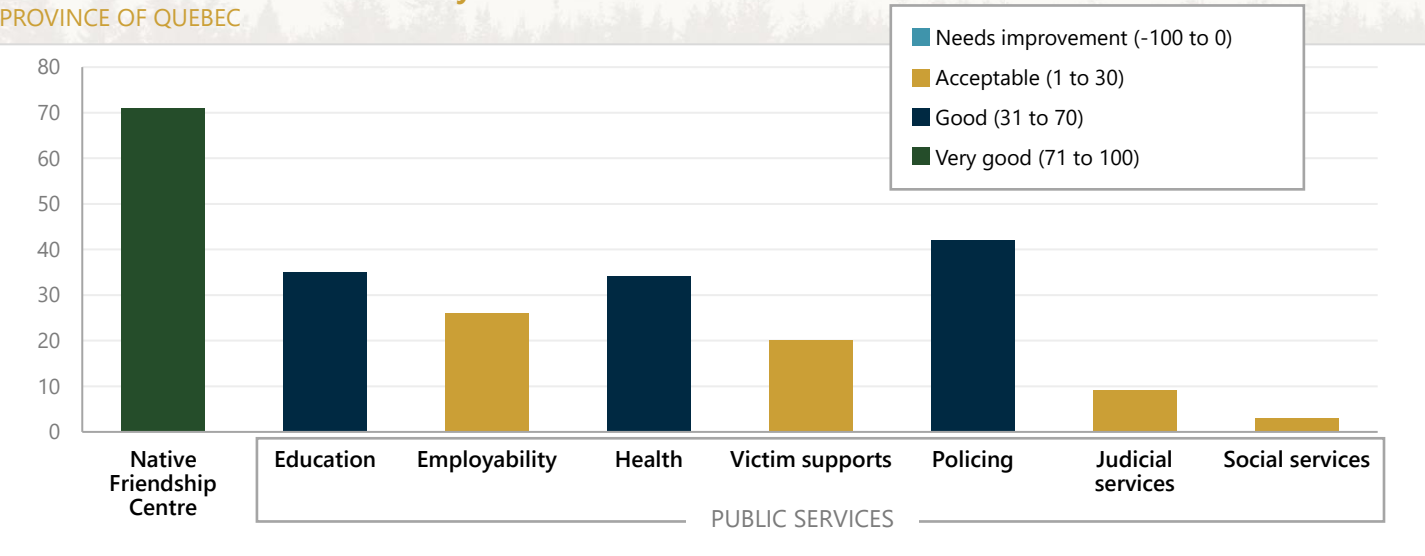
RECOMMENDATION 5:

Ensure adequate and recurring funding to support the implementation of the assigned duties.

The essential contribution of Native Friendship Centres to the implementation of the Bill

According to a 2025 survey conducted by the RCAAQ¹⁰ among 2,003 Indigenous individuals, the services offered by Native Friendship Centres are conspicuously considered more accessible than those of the public network.

Assessment of service accessibility levels PROVINCE OF QUEBEC



This increased accessibility is notably due to the proximity of Friendship Centres to their members, their deep roots in urban environments and their capacity to offer culturally and linguistically tailored services. They also act as trusted interfaces with institutions, facilitating connections between Indigenous people and public systems.

In urban areas, however, access to services for Indigenous people is not limited to mere physical availability; it also hinges on a crucial relational dimension. The quality of interactions, respect for cultural realities and the level of trust placed in professionals directly influence service utilization and satisfaction. In this regard, Friendship Centres stand out for their ability to deliver strong relational accessibility by creating safe, discrimination-free environments while addressing individual needs.

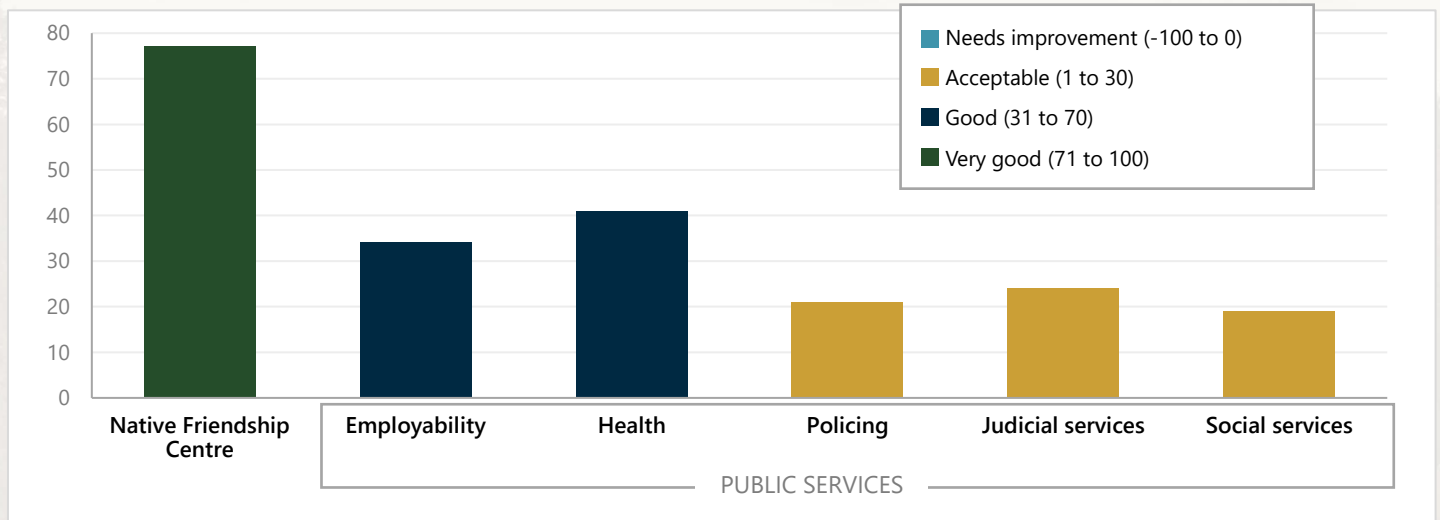
This positive perception is further reflected in the evaluation of service satisfaction levels. While public services mostly receive an acceptable satisfaction level based on an net promoter score (NPS)¹¹—police services (21), legal services (24), social services (19), healthcare services (41) and employability services (34)—the services offered by Native Friendship Centres stand out clearly for their high satisfaction level, achieving an NPS score of 77. This significant gap highlights the added value of Friendship Centres, whose approaches and practices meet the needs, realities and expectations of Indigenous populations more effectively. Furthermore, although the results observed across public sectors are relatively positive, they nevertheless reveal substantial room for improvement to better align with the expectations and realities of Indigenous people.

¹⁰ The data were collected from a sample of 2,003 Indigenous respondents surveyed between July 2024 and February 2025. The full methodology and results will be published soon. The results presented here have been weighted and may vary slightly.

¹¹ The net promoter score (NPS) is a key indicator measuring customer loyalty and overall satisfaction. The NPS offers a consolidated approach based on a central question: an individual's willingness to recommend a service or organization to those around them. This intention to recommend serves as a direct indicator of the level of trust and overall sentiment toward the service being evaluated. This approach provides data that is comparable over time and across different organizations.

Evaluation of satisfaction levels for services used in the past 12 months

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Cross-referencing these two indicators—accessibility and satisfaction—highlights a crucial finding: Friendship Centres are not only more accessible, they also provide services that more effectively meet the needs and realities of urban Indigenous populations. In particular, their role as trusted intermediaries helps reduce Indigenous people’s reluctance to use institutional mechanisms by mitigating barriers rooted in mistrust, procedural complexity or a lack of understanding of the processes involved.

Furthermore, Friendship Centres already provide vital social and technical support: assisting with procedures, explaining provided information, guiding decision-making and offering access to a continuum of services. This support is enduring, encompassing medium- and long-term follow-up as well as integration with other resources (healthcare, justice, housing, employability, etc.), while accounting for the role of loved ones and the extended family. This comprehensive, relational approach is at the core of their effectiveness.

These practices align perfectly with the spirit of the Bill and support its objectives, demonstrating that organizations like Native Friendship Centres are already playing an active and far-reaching role in the very actions that the legislation seeks to formalize and strengthen.

In the context of implementing the Bill, these findings build a strong case for formal recognition and increased reliance on Native Friendship Centres. By leveraging partners that combine accessibility, high satisfaction levels and expertise in support services, the government maximizes the chances of success for its intervention while ensuring a concrete, tailored and culturally safe response for Indigenous populations.

Conclusion

Bill 4 is a significant lever for prevention, as it aims to better equip individuals and institutions to face the risks associated with intimate partner and family violence. In this sense, it aligns with a necessary commitment to strengthen protective and intervention mechanisms well ahead of crisis situations.

However, achieving its objectives hinges on several foundational conditions for success. The effectiveness of the framework will depend largely on its ability to be truly accessible, not only formally, but also across its relational and cultural dimensions. Trust in institutions, which remains fragile for many Indigenous people, continues to be a decisive factor in whether proposed mechanisms will be used. In this regard, support plays a central role, both in facilitating the understanding of procedures and in guiding individuals through their journeys while accounting for individual, family and community realities. An inclusive vision of family dynamics, one that explicitly recognizes the role of loved ones and extended networks, is also vital.

In this context, Native Friendship Centres occupy a strategic position. They are essential partners for ensuring an effective, accessible and culturally safe implementation of Bill 4. Their contribution extends far beyond providing supplementary support; it is a vital prerequisite for the proposed measures to achieve their full scope.

Therefore, fully recognizing and supporting the role of Native Friendship Centres within the framework of Bill 4 is a critical condition for maximizing its positive outcomes, as it ensures that this response is tailored, equitable and consistent with the realities of Indigenous populations.

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