



REGROUPEMENT
DES CENTRES D'AMITIÉ
AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC

POSITION PAPER

Health, Transitions and Continuity in the Life Trajectories of Indigenous Men and Boys in Urban Settings

Position paper tabled as part of Canada's Men and Boys' Health
Strategy

The Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ) represents and supports the network of Native Friendship Centres in Quebec. For over 50 years, the association has worked to improve the living conditions of First Nations and Inuit living in urban areas and to promote their social inclusion, self-reliance and wellness.

Native Friendship Centres are community living environments and service hubs that support Indigenous people in various aspects of their lives, including health and wellness, youth, family, justice, employability, culture and housing efforts. They also serve as spaces for cultural connection, helping to maintain peoples' ties with their identity, community and support networks.

Today, **64% of First Nations members and Inuit in Quebec live in cities and towns** (Gagnon, M. et al., 2023). A survey shows that more than 60% of Indigenous people live or have lived in urban areas (First Nations Governance Centre, 2018). Yet, Indigenous realities are still too often viewed as ending at community limits.

Indigenous men are often described as being hard to reach: they are said to seek medical care less often, ask for help less frequently or be less involved in their health. Yet, the Indigenous men we meet are not absent from public systems. They are in constant interaction with health, youth protection, justice, housing, employment, education and community organizations.

A young person leaving a foster care placement with no support network. A boy changing schools without any cultural support. A man going back into the street, alone, after a hospital stay. A father losing touch with his children. Another is coming out of detention with no housing or support.

Taken individually, each of these cases seems to be affected by a different system. Examined together, though, they reveal life trajectories impacted by service gaps, delayed interventions and a lack of ongoing support. When people are not supported through transitions, discrimination, economic insecurity, difficult mobility, isolation, disconnection from culture and other factors compound (RCAAQ, 2018).

A recent RCAAQ survey shows that many Indigenous men simultaneously experience multiple forms of vulnerability: 67% report having experienced racism, 30% report mental health issues, 37% are unemployed and 41% have had contact with the justice system as an offender or defendant (RCAAQ, 2026).

Indigenous people's experiences with public services, particularly in urban settings, have a direct impact on their health and relationship with the institutions providing services. The literature shows that stigma, discrimination and profiling lead to misdiagnoses, inappropriate follow-up and the underutilization of services. This lived experience fosters a lasting mistrust of institutions and often delays requests for help.

All too often, the first point of contact for Indigenous men with public services is the justice system, public safety or emergency response, and not early access to prevention, community-based or support services.

Many Indigenous men express their desire to support their families, fully carry out their role as fathers and build meaningful relationships. Many would ask for help but only do so when a trusting relationship is already established. Approaches focused on outreach, sense of belonging and lasting connection are therefore particularly important in reaching men before their difficulties escalate.

Consultations with Indigenous men show also that their wellness grows from their ability to contribute to family, pass on knowledge, maintain a living connection to the land and develop meaningful relationships with other men. Positive male role models—fathers, Elders, support workers, mentors or community members—play an important role in normalizing asking for help, countering stigma and modelling alternative expressions of masculinity.

The community-based and outreach approaches the Native Friendship Centres promote create culturally safe spaces where these relationships can develop over time. They make it possible to reach men and boys before crisis sets in, to support them through major life transitions and to ensure continuity across services, during transitions and through upheaval (RCAAQ, 2018).

In this context, improving the health of Indigenous men is not simply a matter of increasing the availability of health care. The real issue is who actually can reach Indigenous men and boys to provide prevention services—before crisis, judicialization or an emergency becomes their primary point of entry into the public system—and who then provides them with ongoing support through transitions and times of disruption.

The RCAAQ recommends that the Strategy

1. explicitly recognize Indigenous men and boys living in urban areas as a priority population,
2. provide long-term support for urban Indigenous infrastructure, including Friendship Centres, which ensure continuity in relationships and life trajectories,
3. invest in critical life transitions, particularly adolescence, the end of foster care and the beginning of parenthood,
4. recognize culture, the land, social and intergenerational ties, and cultural safety as essential determinants of wellness and
5. develop indicators to better document the realities Indigenous men and boys experience in urban areas.

Improving the health of Indigenous men and boys requires fully recognizing urban Indigenous realities and fostering conditions that enable positive life paths, via cultural grounding, connection to the land, community belonging and culturally safe outreach services. Canada's Men and Boys' Health Strategy is an opportunity to recognize that these conditions already exist within the RCAAQ's network and that they serve as a concrete lever for sustainably improving the wellness of Indigenous men in urban areas.

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