



PREPARING THE PATH

**A Community Readiness Guide
for bringing midwifery back
to our communities**

*It is the right of Indigenous midwives,
communities and Nations to reclaim birth*



NACM
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL
COUNCIL OF MIDWIVES





About NACM

The National Aboriginal Council of Midwives (NACM) exists to promote excellence in reproductive health care for Inuit, First Nations, and Métis women and families. We advocate for the restoration of midwifery education, the provision of midwifery services, and choice of birthplace for all Indigenous communities consistent with the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in line with the Calls to Action from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

NACM's vision is to see Indigenous midwives practicing in every Indigenous community.

This resource was developed to support the growth and sustainability of Indigenous midwifery as part of the 2017 Federal midwifery investment through First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB).

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Introduction – About this Guide

Birth is the beginning. Bringing birth back has enormous cultural significance and will have ripple effects in all areas of community health.

This Community Readiness Guide is a tool created by the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives (NACM) to support Indigenous communities as we re-establish community-based midwifery services. This guide can be used by Indigenous communities at any stage in the process of returning midwifery and birth. This guide is intended to be used by Indigenous communities, partners, knowledge holders, governments, and other stakeholders. It will be particularly useful for communities who are working through the logistical steps to ensure a viable and sustainable plan.

NACM believes that the work of returning birth to Indigenous communities is rooted in the following commitments:

- ~ **An appreciation of childbirth as a healthy spiritual journey rooted in the knowledges and ceremonies of Indigenous peoples.**
- ~ **The centering of Indigenous midwifery-led knowledges and clinical care within a broad, holistic vision of community health and well-being**
- ~ **An act of self-determination, reconciliation and community capacity-building**

A note about the terms that are used in this document:

Indigenous Midwives may be First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. They may work as Registered Midwives in their licensing province, or practice as Aboriginal Midwives. Aboriginal Midwife is a title in Ontario that describes midwives practicing within the Exception for Aboriginal Midwives clause is a descriptor; many Indigenous midwives personally identify according to the Nation they are affiliated with. For example, Indigenous midwives may identify as an Anishinaabe Midwife, Inuk Midwife, Onkwehonwe Midwife, Métis Midwife, or other.



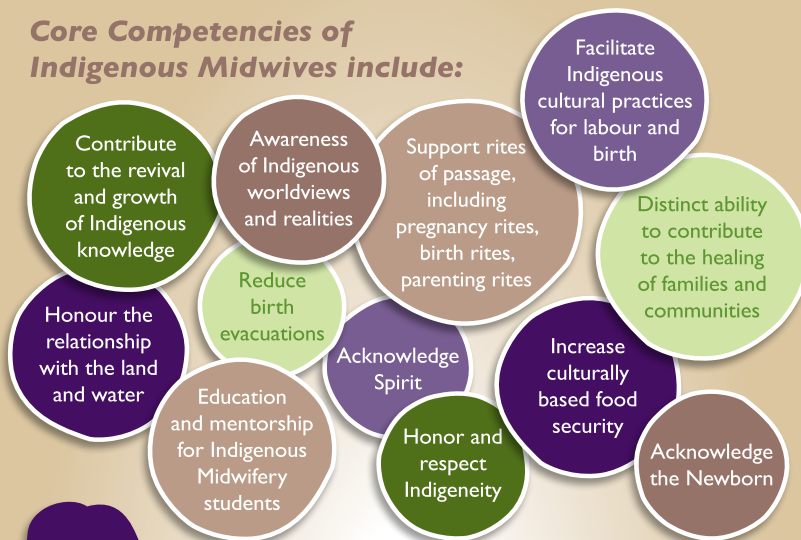
WHY INDIGENOUS MIDWIFERY MATTERS

What is Indigenous Midwifery?

Indigenous midwives are sexual and reproductive health care providers who have unique cultural knowledge, practices and competencies that are responsive to the needs of diverse communities, particularly Indigenous communities.



Core Competencies of Indigenous Midwives include:



Essential, clinically excellent, culturally rooted, primary health care BY Indigenous health professionals FOR Indigenous families and communities



Indigenous Midwifery students need:

- ✓ Diverse pathways to education
- ✓ Culturally safe education
- ✓ Competency-led apprenticeship, mentorship and education
- ✓ Community-based programs BY and FOR Indigenous people

SUPPORT INDIGENOUS MIDWIFERY

- 1 Honour the role of Indigenous Midwives and their role in improving the health and wellness of Indigenous communities
- 2 Provide funding to establish and sustain midwifery services in communities
- 3 Provide funding to initiate a national Indigenous Midwifery education strategy
- 4 Implement policy frameworks that enable Indigenous Midwives to establish and sustain services in communities



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Save the Children

www.indigenoumidwifery.ca

What is Indigenous Midwifery?

Indigenous midwives are autonomous primary health care providers responsible for the clinical management and care throughout pregnancy, labour, birth, and postpartum. Indigenous midwives are vital to the well-being of our communities. They provide high-quality sexual and reproductive care for pregnant people, babies, and families and uphold our peoples' languages, oral cultures, and traditions.

Indigenous Midwifery Knowledges and Skills:

In 2019, NACM published a landmark document – Indigenous Midwifery Knowledges and Skills: A Framework of Competencies. This document can be used to start growing and teaching Indigenous Midwifery.

The competencies articulate the knowledges held by Indigenous midwives and illustrate the critical role Indigenous midwives play in nation-building – the enabling of health and safety in our Indigenous communities in rural, remote and urban areas. Indigenous midwives play a key role in building healthy and safe Indigenous communities.

I.0 | Indigenous Midwives Task Chart

	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
A Provide Culturally Safe Care	Acknowledge Spirit	Form Relationship with Client	Value Diverse Ways of Learning and Knowing	Honour the Relationship with the Land	Provide Care in a Variety of Settings	Respect and Acknowledge the Power of Stories	Acknowledge Indigeneity	Respect and Acknowledge the Power of Indigenous Languages	Contribute to the Healing of Families and Communities Through the Practice of Midwifery	Acknowledge and Respect the Power of Song
	A11	A12	A13							
B Support Rites of Passage	Acknowledge and Respect the Power of Dance	Acknowledge and Respect the Power of Prayer and Meditation	Acknowledge and Respect the Power of Dreams							
	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10
C Communicate	Support Traditional Adoption Practices	Support Placental Rites of Passage	Support Parenting Rites of Passage	Support Grandparenting Rites of Passage	Support Childhood Rites of Passage	Support Death Rites of Passage	Support Healthy Grieving	Support Rites of Passage for Choice of Life Partner	Support Pregnancy Rites of Passage	Support Birth Rites of Passage
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8		
D Develop the Profession	Provide Informed Choice	Document Care	Maintain Confidentiality	Use Respectful Nonverbal Communication	Consult and Refer as Indicated	Be an Effective Team Member	Lead Case Management	Represent Indigenous Midwifery	Use Various Methods for Health Promotion	Advocate for Clients
	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7			
E Support Indigenous Health and Well-Being	Provide Mentorship for Indigenous Midwifery Students	Educate Healthcare Providers about Indigenous Midwifery	Participate in Professional Development Activities	Participate in Research	Recruit Indigenous Midwives	Develop Protocols and Policies	Participate in Peer Reviews			
	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10
	Complete Comprehensive Health History	Complete Physical Exam	Conduct Pelvic Exams	Provide Education and Conduct Breast/Chest Care	Prescribe and Administer Medications	Provide Preconception Counseling	Provide Education about Healthy Sexuality	Screen and Test for Sexually Transmitted Infections	Provide Contraception Services	Counsel and Screen for Infertility
	E11	E12	E13	E14	E15	E16	E17	E18		
	Educate about Good Health Practices	Provide Education and Screening About Substance Use	Provide Education and Screening about Intimate Partner Violence	Recognize and Respond to Mental Health Concerns	Attend Community Functions	Facilitate Community-Based Food Security	Contribute to the Retrieval and Growth of Indigenous Knowledge	Facilitate Family Bonding		
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10
F Manage Prenatal Care	Discuss and Facilitate Pregnancy Options	Manage Early Pregnancy Loss	Complete Baseline Pregnancy Assessment	Establish Estimated Date of Birth	Provide Education to Promote Healthy Pregnancy	Offer Prenatal Genetic Screening	Conduct and Interpret Routine Prenatal Diagnostic Testing	Support Healthy Nutritional Status of Pregnant Person	Monitor Fetal Growth and Well-Being	Identify, Manage and Refer for Complications of Pregnancy
	F11	F12	F13	F14	F15	F16				
G Manage Labour and Delivery	Correct Fetal Malposition	Navigate the Child Protection System	Educate Pregnant Person about Coping Techniques for Labour and Delivery	Educate Pregnant Person about Labour Process	Assess Labour Readiness	Provide Routine Clinical Assessments of Pregnant Person	Monitor Fetal Well-Being	Manage Labour and Birth Emergencies	Facilitate Vaginal Delivery	Protect the Birth Environment
	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	G10
H Manage Postpartum Care	Facilitate Onset of Labour	Facilitate Emergency Transport	Set Up Birthing Space	Monitor Labour Progress	Facilitate Labour Progress	Monitor Fetal Well-Being	Monitor Pregnant Person's Well-Being			
	G11	G12	G13	G14						
	Protect Integrity of Pelvic Floor	Manage Third Stage of Labour	Facilitate Cultural Practices for Labour and Birth	Manage Later Pregnancy Loss or Stillbirth						
	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6				
I Provide Newborn Care	Manage Postpartum Care	Monitor Well-Being of Birth Parent	Assess and Repair Pelvic Floor	Provide Education and Advice about Common Complications of Postpartum	Recognize and Respond to Postpartum Mood Disorders	Facilitate Cultural Practices for Postpartum				
	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10
	Acknowledge the Newborn	Facilitate Community-Based Cultural Practices for the Newborn	Promote Birthing Parent-Baby Bonding	Support Newborn Transition	Resuscitate Newborn	Conduct Newborn Physical Assessment and Screening	Support Infant Feeding	Monitor Well-Being of Newborn	Educate in Newborn Care and Development	Manage Newborn Acute Care
	I11									
	Support Baby with Needs for Follow-Up Care									



Indigenous midwifery also:

EXPANDS and extends the capacity of the health care system including in infrastructure-limited areas. Midwives offer complete comprehensive health history, physical exam, pelvic exam, breastfeeding consultation and education, contraception services, sexually transmitted infections screening and testing, education about good health practices, and more.

RESPONDS to the Indigenous human health resource crisis: Indigenous midwives work as preceptors and educators in community-based and university-based education programs. Apprentice new midwives, mentor new and aspiring midwives, establish new practices and birth centers, develop curriculum, offer continuing education courses for practicing midwives, and generally work to advance the profession within Canada and internationally.

DISRUPTS patterns that sever bonds: Working extensively with people who are involved in child welfare while pregnant, Indigenous midwives offer interventions in child welfare practices that prevent and reduce newborn apprehension.

CENTERS community voices:

The principle of self-determination is at the heart of Indigenous midwifery practices. Community-based practices are designed and developed collaboratively with communities, enabling and sustaining improved sexual and reproductive health outcomes.

SUPPORTS rites of passage

including traditional adoption practices, puberty rites and parenting rites. Indigenous midwives support communities as they reclaim and restore culture and ceremony in relation to pregnancy and childbirth, parenting, baby care and breastfeeding.

RESTORES the sacredness

of birth: Midwives offer an appreciation of childbirth as a healthy, spiritual journey rooted in the knowledges and ceremonies of Indigenous peoples.

PROVIDES an understanding

of healing capacity that is created by returning balance to the life cycle experienced in communities that have lived a generation or more without births.





Community Readiness

There are different pathways to returning midwifery and birth to communities. In addition to having a strong desire to keep families together, communities will also benefit when they have the following:

- ~ a tradition or memory of midwifery and/or living traditional midwifery Knowledge Keepers
- ~ a long-term vision of a thriving and sustainable midwifery service
- ~ a vision that addresses training and education
- ~ community leadership that is engaged and supportive

Multiple factors will shape how the journey unfolds, including issues such as distance to emergency services, funding mechanisms, opportunities to collaborate with existing health care teams, housing, birth numbers, and regulatory policies (Oslen, Pathways Report, 2020).

The following graphic can be used as a tool to support progress along the pathway from visioning to implementation and long term sustainability planning.



READINESS Component

- ~ Plan for the restoration and preservation of Indigenous midwifery knowledges, birth knowledges
- ~ Involvement of community members
- ~ Involvement of Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- ~ Awareness of Midwifery Regulatory status – either through Indigenous health governance or Provincial/Territorial midwifery legislation




LONG-TERM vision and plan

- ~ Training/apprenticeship plans for local midwives
- ~ Succession planning
- ~ Vision and planning for global sexual health services
- ~ Scope of care
- ~ Sustained funding strategy

SHORT-TERM plan



- ~ Funding plan
- ~ Clinic space and equipment
- ~ Dedicated birth space
- ~ Hiring a midwife and support staff
- ~ Referral process in place, including for emergency obstetrical care
- ~ Quality and clinical care review process (does not have to be local)
- ~ Processes and protocol (documentation)
- ~ Hospital privileges and/or referral process
- ~ Liability Insurance
- ~ Billing number



Re-establishing midwifery-led community-based birth is often difficult. Sustaining promising practices and early successes is important! Below is a list of factors that have facilitated growth and sustainability:

The infographic features a vertical blue bar on the left side with a stylized white tree silhouette. To the right of this bar, ten light blue circles of varying sizes are arranged in a loose, organic pattern. Each circle contains a text-based factor for sustainability. The circles are connected by thin, light blue lines, suggesting a network or interconnectedness of these factors.

Midwives
who are
Indigenous

Physician and nursing
teams that have
advanced training in
perinatal emergencies
and are a collaborative
part of care provision

Established emergency
services system with
additional training in
perinatal emergencies

Funding sources
that are linked
with government
healthcare systems

Identification of a
midwife or midwives
who want and are
able to work in the
community


Midwives
who are part of
the community

Access to
traditional
Healers,
Knowledge
Keepers, Elders

Health care providers
that participate in
regular team building
and continuing
education activities

Streamlined
referral services
for diagnostics
and higher levels
of care

Local training of
local midwives
(apprenticeship-
based training)



Restoring birth and Indigenous midwifery back to a community is a journey to restore the sacred balance. It is a journey that involves teaching and learning, building and strengthening partnerships, and taking key steps together. NACM is a resource for communities exploring or walking along this path – NACM members have been providing Indigenous midwifery-led birth in communities successfully for over 30 years. This restoration work is the heart of our organization.

It is important that all Indigenous people globally restore and or maintain the knowledge and role that midwifery leadership has for communities. This knowledge is vital to our birthing families and will grow our children to be stronger, healthier and more confident in who they are and where they are going.

NACM is A RESOURCE for you

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🌐 www.indigenousmidwifery.ca

🐦 [@NACMidwives](https://twitter.com/NACMidwives)



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