

Hello, Bonjour, Kwe Kwe

Allow me to start by acknowledging that we are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

C'est un honneur d'être dans une salle remplie de tant de connaissances, tant de compétences et d'engagement indéfectible au service des femmes, des bébés et des familles.

It is an honour to be in this room filled with so much knowledge, so much skill and so much unwavering commitment to serving women, babies and families.

Thank you for inviting me.

Lucky are the mother and child who have known the strength and dedication of a midwife.

The care provided during pregnancy, during childbirth and in those essential weeks after set the stage for strong, healthy children and strong, healthy families. And, across the country, midwives work tirelessly to this end every day.

In Indigenous communities, this also means that the care an Indigenous mother and her child receives must be culturally appropriate, close to home, and informed by tradition. This makes Indigenous midwifery distinct in its reclamation of ceremony in order to reinforce identity and restore a connection to the land.

Care led by a midwife has been associated with reduced risk of losing a baby before 24 weeks; with fewer interventions during labour; with a greater likelihood of spontaneous vaginal birth; and, high levels of breast feeding. This is crucial in remote communities, where midwifery care reduces the need for intervention and dramatically reduces the number of women who must travel to give birth. It's birthing centres like the ones in Nunavut and Nunavik who are leading examples of this.

The truth is that, despite the benefits, most Indigenous women in Canada do not have access to midwifery care.

We want to change that. For the first-time ever, our government invested in Indigenous midwifery. Budget 2017 committed \$6 million over five years for Indigenous midwifery projects. Three have now started in First Nation communities in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Each of these projects is community driven and responsive to local needs. Communities have already begun implementing initiatives that focus on ensuring that essential cultural knowledge around women's health and childbirth are preserved and transferred to new families.

These investments are important, but they represent first steps along an important path and we hope they will also inspire provinces, territories, regulatory bodies, hospitals, and care providers to make commitments of their own.

More needs to be done: more training, more funding, more midwives.

I want to thank you for your incredible dedication, effort and commitment. Your stories, your knowledge, and your advocacy for families, make certain the best possible start for children and mothers.

When births that are based in culture return to communities, the impacts are felt far beyond the delivery room, and far beyond the immediate family. Every community has the right to hear the cries of a newborn baby, to welcome that child with love, language, and culture.

Thank you, Meegwitch, Nakurmiik, Merci.