

DIVERSE PATHWAYS: *Bringing Indigenous midwifery home*

Created by The National Aboriginal Council of Midwives



CORE COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK

Indigenous Midwives:

- ✓ PROVIDE CULTURALLY SAFE CARE
- ✓ SUPPORT RITES OF PASSAGE
- ✓ COMMUNICATE
- ✓ DEVELOP THE PROFESSION
- ✓ SUPPORT INDIGENOUS HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
- ✓ MANAGE PRENATAL CARE
- ✓ MANAGE LABOUR AND DELIVERY
- ✓ MANAGE POSTPARTUM CARE
- ✓ PROVIDE NEWBORN CARE



Warm thanks to: Claire Dion Fletcher, Evelyn George, Julia Couture-Glassco and Jessica Hebert (Researcher-Writers); Nathalie Pambrun and Cherylee Bourgeois (NACM-SCC Committee members; Melanie Laquerre (Designer).

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What is INDIGENOUS MIDWIFERY?

Indigenous midwives provide essential, clinically excellent, culturally rooted sexual and reproductive health care for Indigenous communities.

An Indigenous midwife is the keeper of ceremonies, a leader and mentor, and someone who passes on important values about health to the next generation. The care and knowledge provided by Indigenous midwives is vital to the health and well-being of Indigenous communities. An increasing number of communities are seeking to restore midwifery services as close to home as possible, recognizing community-based midwifery-led births as central to healing and wellbeing.

There are many paths to returning Indigenous midwifery to our communities. This booklet aims to share some examples of the multiple pathways Indigenous midwives have taken. Funding models, distance to emergency services, opportunities to collaborate with existing health care teams, housing, birth numbers and regulatory policies all have an impact on the planning, establishment and sustainability of midwifery practices. Our objective in this booklet is to provide examples to communities wishing to bring back Indigenous-led midwifery services.



INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

Indigenous midwives work in a variety of creative and innovative ways to bring birth back to our communities. Indigenous midwives have an approach to care that responds to the unique needs of our communities which is highlighted in our Core Competency Framework. Here are just a few of our core competencies and ways we work to meet the needs of our clients, families and communities.

Core Competencies of Indigenous Midwives include:



✓ **Indigenous midwives offer clinically excellent, culturally relevant care that is Indigenous led FOR Indigenous communities.**

“The agency as a whole provides culturally safe care through an integrated approach that honours traditions, cultures, and personal values and beliefs.” – *Dilico Anishinabek Family Care*

“We build relationships with elders and knowledge keepers within the urban community. We have a commitment to bringing ceremony into an urban centre.” – *Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto*

“The practice opened in 2005 and within three years of operation, 100% of women in Fort Smith were choosing midwifery care for their reproductive health needs.” – *Fort Smith Region Midwifery Program*

✓ **Indigenous midwives center communities and families, including those considered ‘high risk’ and manage referrals to other care providers while ensuring culturally safe care.**

“We accept all women into care regardless of risk factors. Once in care, they are deemed to be primary care clients or supportive care clients. Supportive care clients receive transportation to and from specialist appointment, advocacy, referrals, Traditional Indigenous healing modalities and teachings, additional emotional support between scheduled appointment with physicians. We accompany them to the hospital in labour and serve them in a supportive and advocacy role. We find that our supportive care clients benefit just as much or even more from our midwifery services than primary care clients.” – *Tsi Non:we lonnakeratstha Ona:grahsta Birth Centre*

“Historically, Aboriginal midwives cared for women in all seasons of life. So today, in addition to offering prenatal classes with an Indigenous component for all the women in the community (it’s not necessary to be a midwifery client) and providing primary care for pregnant women, the midwives provide additional services that range from fertility counseling to screening for breast and cervical cancers to cultural teaching for women of all ages.” – *Tsi Non:we lonnakeratstha Ona:grahsta Birth Centre*

“All midwives must complete Indigenous Cultural Safety training and receive comprehensive orientation to SOAHAC’s holistic integrated model of care that blends western and traditional values. The midwife works collaboratively with other health care practitioners to place culture and tradition at the core of all health and community development practices.” – *Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre*

✓ **Indigenous midwives are autonomous health care providers who work in collaboration with a variety of services and health professionals when necessary.**

“We collaborate with nurses, doctors, obstetricians, social workers, as well as midwives in neighbouring communities and those working in nearby hospitals. Our goal is always to offer more personalized, clinically excellent, culturally relevant and continuous care with a variety of options based on the needs and desires of pregnant people and their families, and to offer services as close to home as possible.” – *Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto*

✓ **Indigenous midwives have an approach to collaboration that pushes norms, individualizes care, and consistently puts pregnant people first.**

“Indigenous midwives care for clients with past or current history of trauma or abuse. We care for clients who are involved with child welfare, experience homelessness or mental wellness concerns, or are substance involved. We help

clients navigate social services such as housing, food security, addiction treatment, parenting, and child welfare advocacy. We encourage ways to strengthen family bonding, supporting parents in their new roles.” – *Nathalie Pambrun, Sage-Femme Métis Franco-Manitobaine*

“We are primary care providers for clients regardless of their level of risk - for folks with complex medical conditions and/or high-risk pregnancies, we work in collaboration with our consultant OBs and/or the Family Doctors in town.” – *Hay River Midwifery program*

“We work collaboratively with the Traditional Program Team and the Primary Care Team at the health centre to provide culturally-safe care that uses the Woven Blanket model.” – *Shkagamik-Kwe Health Centre, Sudbury*

✓ **Indigenous midwives demonstrate a commitment to growth and revival that includes supporting access to Indigenous midwifery education by Indigenous midwives and as close to home as possible.**

“Storytelling is a respected Inuit cultural way of conveying knowledge, learning pattern recognition, judgment, and problem solving. Theoretical knowledge about assessment and making diagnoses of both normal and abnormal situations is gained through listening to and telling stories which are primarily based on real clinical situations. Students and midwifery mentors engage in daily chart review, a feedback and debriefing process where clinical situations, assessments, and management are discussed in detail. In this way students learn about the organization and planning of care, health care language, and decision making.” – *Inuulitsivik Midwifery Education Program*



Portraits of INDIGENOUS MIDWIFERY PRACTICES

There are many different models for your community's midwifery practice, depending on the resources available and the structures or institutions already in place.

Here are some portraits of already existing models:

The *Onkwehon:we Midwives Collective (OMC)* in Akwesasne is a self-governed Indigenous midwifery practice with a birthing centre in the community. OMC works as a team of midwives and holistic caregivers to provide assistance to Indigenous expectant parents and their families with reclaiming control of their birth plans. While OMC midwives do not have hospital privileges, they have established a system of collaborative care so that home and hospital care is offered, which includes maintaining relationships with the local hospitals as well as the maternity care team. They also offer a community based Indigenous midwifery training program, and work to educate the health care teams and stakeholders they work with.



The *Hay River Midwifery Program* works out of the regional health clinic, which is located off-reserve. They offer services to all pregnant people and their families living in Hay River and surrounding area, including K'atl'odeeche First Nation and Enterprise, regardless of their level of risk. They have three Registered Midwives, with hospital privileges, who work collaboratively with other health care practitioners at the clinic. They are the only perinatal care providers in the region. Their referral centre for high-risk women and emergency transfer is Stanton Territorial Hospital in Yellowknife, NT and it is 500km by road, or 200km by air away from Hay River Regional Health Centre.



The *Tulattavik Health Centre* is located in Kuujjuaq (QC) and serves the 7 Inuit communities located on Ungava Bay. They have Registered Midwives who work in collaboration with the other care practitioners at the health centre. Patients from other communities have to fly in to Kuujjuaq to access services, and patients who need referrals for high-risk births fly out to Montreal, which is 1452 km away. Inuit midwives are trained through apprenticeships with practicing Inuit midwives and their certification is recognized by the provincial government. Midwifery care allows for people to stay in or closer to their community and family for births, while reducing birth interventions such as c-sections.



Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto (SGMT) is located in downtown Toronto. SGMT serves Indigenous and non-Indigenous families within the city of Toronto, with a focus on Indigenous families. SGMT has 17 midwives at the practice, 7 of whom are Indigenous. They have hospital privileges at Sunnybrook Health Science Centre, which also acts as their referral centre. SGMT is committed to taking an active role in Indigenous led research, especially related to health and midwifery.



What can INDIGENOUS MIDWIFERY LOOK LIKE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

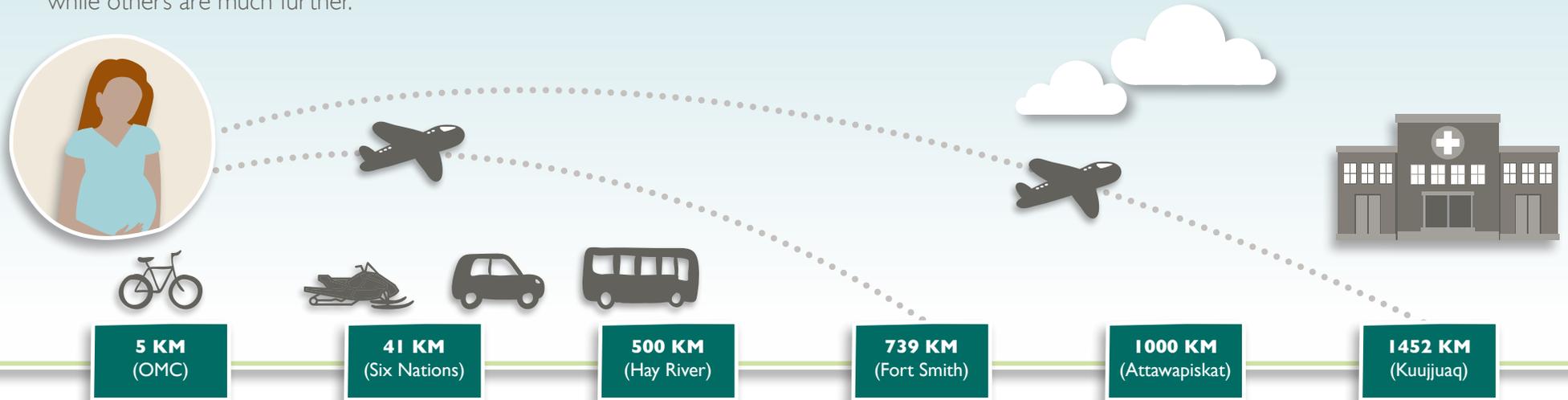
Indigenous midwives offer services in a wide variety of places and settings. We offer care where our families and communities are.



Referrals and hospital privileges

At times, pregnant people may need to be referred to a hospital or clinic for specific care that cannot be provided by the midwife (e.g.: performing a C-section). Some referral centers are close by, while others are much further.

Indigenous midwives who do not have hospital privileges still provide clinically excellent, culturally rooted primary care.



Midwives establish a close collaboration with local, regional, provincial/territorial health services and health care practitioners, to ensure collaborative referrals when needed, in addition to continuous care and support of their patient.

“AT THE TULATTAVIK HEALTH CENTER IN KUUJUAQ WE DO NOT HAVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE TO PERFORM C-SECTION. OUR CLINICAL SKILLS AND TRAINING ENABLE US TO KEEP FAMILIES HOME SAFELY AND OUR DATA DEMONSTRATES THIS. 92% OF BIRTHS HAPPEN IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND OUR RATE OF EVACUATION FOR C-SECTIONS IS AMONG THE LOWEST WORLDWIDE.”

Funding

Generally midwives are paid as either salaried employees or per-course-of-care of the Province or Territory that they practice in. Most practices are multi-funded operations drawing on:

- Provincial/Territorial Ministry of Health and Long Term Care
- Federal funding
- Provincial/Territorial Ministry of Children and Youth Services
- Band Council
- Community Health Agencies and Access Centres
- Unique funding envelopes, such as the Indigenous Midwifery Program funding in Ontario



CORE VALUES *of* ABORIGINAL MIDWIFERY

HEALING
RESPECT
AUTONOMY
COMPASSION
BONDING
BREASTFEEDING

CULTURAL SAFETY
**CLINICAL
EXCELLENCE**
EDUCATION
RESPONSIBILITY

Our Vision: Indigenous midwives in every Indigenous community.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous midwifery must be brought home to our communities. Indigenous midwives are agents of social change, vital to the wellbeing of our communities.

We hope that this booklet will help communities seeking to reclaim, grow and sustain Indigenous midwifery as close to home as possible.

For more information on the unique skills of Indigenous midwives, visit our website at:

**[indigenoumidwifery.ca/
core-competencies](http://indigenoumidwifery.ca/core-competencies)**.

If you are interested in supporting the growth of Indigenous midwifery in your community reach out to us at nacm@indigenoumidwifery.ca for additional resources and information.



NACM

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL
COUNCIL OF MIDWIVES

300 - 2330 Notre Dame West, Montreal, QC, H3J 1N4
Tel. 514-807-3668, ext. 220

www.indigenoumidwifery.ca