



# 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.

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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.**

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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.



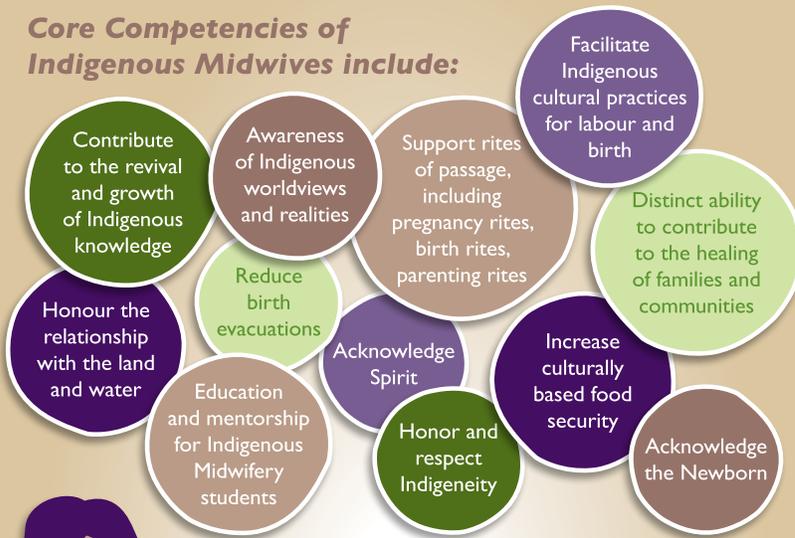
# WHY INDIGENOUS MIDWIFERY MATTERS

## 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



## 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

## Indigenous Midwifery students need:



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

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

Streamlined referral services for diagnostics and higher levels of care

Access to traditional Healers, Knowledge Keepers, Elders

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

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.

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**NACM is A RESOURCE for you**

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