



Indigenous midwifery – A protective force against racism in the health system

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Montreal, QC, January 27, 2021 - On October 16, 2020, the Federal Government convened an urgent meeting to address racism experienced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada's Healthcare System. This meeting was held in response to the tragic death of Joyce Echaquan whose traumatic death has galvanized the country to respond to systemic racism in our health care systems.

Building on this, a second national dialogue was held on **January 27 and 28, 2021** to advance a national action plan to eliminate anti-Indigenous racism in Canadian healthcare. As documented in the summary proceedings from the October meeting, numerous testimonies report experiences of racism and violence that occur while Indigenous people seek sexual and reproductive health care, care that is predominantly not available in Indigenous communities or is provided by non-Indigenous health care providers.

We are at a moment of overlapping and inter-related crisis in our health care system: a maternity care crisis, a reckoning with anti-Indigenous racism in the health sector, and the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to unfold.

Indigenous midwives provide a protective force against racism in the health care setting in our role as Indigenous health care providers, as advocates for clients, and as witnesses to how our people are treated. Indigenous midwives provide care in a way that promotes the sovereignty of Indigenous people, where from the moment of birth our babies are surrounded by Indigenous knowledge and teachings, where they grow up with us as a part of their community to help them understand their bodies and rights.

Indigenous-led sexual and reproductive care IS culturally-safe care.

The National Aboriginal Council of Midwives (NACM), and our small but growing number of midwives, have spent years re-establishing ourselves as Indigenous midwives. We are ready. We know what we need to do to expand Indigenous midwifery in this country, to respond to the need for an Indigenous midwife in every Indigenous community.

This requires a commitment from all levels of government.

In 2017, Health Canada (prior to Indigenous Services Canada) allocated \$6 million over five years to fund First Nation and Inuit community-based midwifery projects. These funds were part of the \$828 million from the 2017 budget to improve the health outcomes of Indigenous people. This funding expires in 2022 and new and greater commitments from the Federal Government are urgently needed, especially at this critical time for women and gender-diverse people who are most disproportionately affected by the overlapping crises we face today.

References

[Reproductive Justice during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Call to Action from Midwives](#)
[NACM Position Statement on Evacuation for Birth](#)
[NACM Position Statement on Indigenous Child Apprehensions](#)
[NACM Position Statement on Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Indigenous Peoples](#)

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