

**Rights, Reconciliation, and Reality:  
The Government of Canada's *Federal Pathway to  
Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women  
and Girls***

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## **Introduction**

In Canada, Indigenous people are disproportionately affected by violence, particularly Indigenous women and girls. In fact, 63% of Indigenous women experience physical or sexual assault (Heidinger, 2022). To combat this gender- and race-based violence, the Government of Canada released the *Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People*. This report, released in 2019, outlined a new comprehensive approach to address the root causes of violence, namely systemic racism against Indigenous communities in Canada (Government of Canada 2019). The government released this report in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Final Report, providing 231 recommendations to the federal government (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

This analysis aims to understand how the government defines the MMIWG problem and how the *Federal Pathway* aims to contribute to Indigenous reconciliation and invest in preventive measures to protect vulnerable populations. Overall, this analysis will highlight the Government of Canada's failure to advance this policy since its implementation over six years ago. The scope of this analysis will focus on the topic of Indigenous women and girls, while also acknowledging the disproportionate effects on two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, plus (2SLGBTQQIA+) Indigenous individuals.

## **Background**

Over the last decade, the Government of Canada has outlined reconciliation with Indigenous communities as a top priority for the nation. The federal government began acting on the 94 Calls to Action outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a public inquiry documenting the history and legacy of the Canadian residential school system, following their 2015 report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). With approximately 13 Calls to Action completed as of September 2025 (Assembly of First Nations, 2025), Indigenous communities and organizations have emphasized the lack of tangible progress toward reconciliation.

Out of these 94 Calls to Action, only one relates to the disproportionate victimization that Indigenous women and girls face. *Action 41* calls for the federal government to investigate the causes and remedies for the victimization of Indigenous women and girls. These investigations would include the links between residential schools' intergenerational legacy and victimization (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Understanding the lack of visibility for the violence against

Indigenous women and girls is essential to understanding the need for specific policies regarding the population.

Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people face disproportionate rates of violence, including homicide, missing persons, and sexual assault. For example, Indigenous women made up 4% of the population but 28% of female homicide victims in 2019 (Government of Canada, 2021). Additionally, in 2023, Statistics Canada released a report showing that Indigenous women and girls were six times more likely to be murdered than other groups of people in Canada (Dutton, 2023). These statistics highlight the historic violence faced by Indigenous people and the need for government intervention.

### **Goals and Priorities of the *Federal Pathway***

As outlined in the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Final Report*, the violence against Indigenous communities “amounts to a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.” (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

In response to the National Inquiry’s claims, the government framed the root problem as far beyond policy, but rather including issues of cultural dislocation, social determinants, and human security. Within the *Federal Pathway* document, the Government of Canada emphasizes the intersectional nature of the problem of gender-based violence against Indigenous women, outlining the systemic issues of colonialism, racism, and sexism entrenched within behaviours. Overall, the final pathway report highlights the need for a holistic, whole-of-government, rights-based and Indigenous-led approach to combating high rates of violence and femicide (Government of Canada, 2019).

The *Federal Pathway* sets out the government’s federal contribution to the larger National Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+, co-developed with a core working group comprising Indigenous organizations, communities, and government leaders (Government of Canada, 2021). Overall, the *Federal Pathway* affirms the rights of Indigenous peoples, recognizing their inherent rights and committing to a rights-based approach while centering Indigenous leadership, survivors, and families in design and decision-making. Additionally, the *Federal Pathway* acknowledges the obligation of the federal government to uphold the dignity of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals.

The *Federal Pathway* attempts to structurally transform the systems that uphold violence, marginalization, and the denial of rights for Indigenous women and girls through four key themes: culture, health and wellness, human safety and security, and justice. These thematic areas of action include revitalizing languages and respecting heritage and culture; addressing health disparities for Indigenous individuals, and creating culturally relevant health services; implementing policies regarding housing and community safety; and addressing systemic racism in policing. Overall, the *Federal Pathway* provides ambitious commitments to long-term change with regard to protections for

Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+, specifically with the investment of \$50 million in funding (Government of Canada, 2019), but somewhat fails to provide a substantial implementation plan.

### **Evaluation of the *Federal Pathway's* Implementation and Results**

Since the release of the *Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People* over six years ago, there has been considerable discourse regarding the federal government's effectiveness in progressing the 231 recommendations from the National Inquiry (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

The report *Progress on Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice*, released by the Assembly of First Nations in 2024, found only moderate progress in some areas, such as governance, accountability, and Indigenous-led services, and little or uneven progress in many others, including education, prevention, and elimination of racist stereotypes (Assembly of First Nations, 2024). This evaluation highlights the failure of the Canadian government to enact substantial change and ensure progress is made with regard to rates of homicide and violence against Indigenous women. Additionally, this report highlights that many root causes of violence and oppression remain unaddressed or are progressing at a slow rate.

In opposition, federal reporting through the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada indicates large funding commitments to the reduction of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, including a total federal funding of \$12.6 billion, with \$613.7m ongoing (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2025). While the federal data demonstrates substantial funding allocations, the Assembly of First Nations' findings highlight a clear disconnect between these investments and actual progress on the ground.

The *Federal Pathway* has the potential to address the core issues of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals because the policy itself recognises the structural causes of this endemic and aims for systemic change. However, the *Federal Pathway* risks becoming a symbolic policy with an overly bureaucratic lens, as it focuses heavily on financial investment rather than integration of Indigenous priorities. In order to create substantial change, the government must address the root causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls, namely colonialism, racism, poverty, and jurisdictional fragmentation, by creating sustained and accountable implementation of policy.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Based on the analysis above, three policy recommendations emerge as both feasible and effective in addressing the persistent violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, and the most significant gaps in implementation.

The Government of Canada should expand funding to include multi-year, core funding agreements for Indigenous women's organizations, 2SLGBTQQIA+ groups, land-based healing programs, and culturally safe shelters. The *Federal Pathway* identifies culture, safety, and wellness as core pillars, but has made limited progress on these factors due to short-term and unpredictable funding. Introducing more stable forms of funding will improve long-term outcomes of the policy, and help build community capacity to prevent violence.

Additionally, the Government of Canada should create federally funded Survivor, Family, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Advisory Councils at both the provincial/territorial and regional levels to ensure that lived experience directly shapes policy development, funding decisions, and evaluation frameworks. These councils should hold decision-making authority over portions of the federal MMIWG2S+ budget, and decide on distinct criteria to assess culturally safe programs and justice reforms. This recommendation directly addresses the mistrust of government-led processes and ensures that Indigenous voices are at the centre of progress.

Lastly, the Government should implement a national framework for policing and justice reform focused on protecting Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Systemic failures in policing, such as slow investigations and racial profiling, are repeatedly identified as major contributors to injustice in gender-based violence against women and girls (Sutton, 2023). Creating a framework to address the systemic barriers to justice will help to ensure the safety of Indigenous women and girls without fear of discrimination.

## **Conclusions**

The *Federal Pathway* represents an ambitious federal commitment to address the long-standing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in Canada. By acknowledging colonialism, racism, sexism, and systemic inequalities as the root causes of violence, the policy situates this crisis in the broader political context. However, the Pathway's aspirations have not manifested into tangible outcomes for Indigenous communities. Despite significant federal investment, many of the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice have yet to be implemented.

The recommendations outlined in this policy analysis, including core funding for Indigenous-led services, the implementation of advisory councils, and systemic policing and justice reform, represent the necessary steps to strengthen the *Federal Pathway's* impact on Indigenous communities. Ultimately, addressing the epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people requires more than isolated initiatives. Only through accountable action and rights-based approaches can the Government of Canada create meaningful reconciliation and ensure the safety of all Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.

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