

# Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP)

SHADOW REPORT:

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Experiences of Disabilities for  
Off-Reserve and Non-Status Indigenous Peoples

January 2025

## A. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) acknowledges its national office is on the unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin peoples. CAP also recognizes the unceded territories of its provincial and territorial constituents, honoring their lasting connection to these lands. We affirm the importance of respecting all Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island and fostering relationships grounded in peace, friendship, and accountability.

Since 1971, CAP has been the national voice for off-reserve Indigenous peoples as one of Canada's five National Indigenous Organizations. CAP's mission is to improve socio-economic conditions for off-reserve status and non-status First Nations, Métis, and Inuit living in southern regions outside Inuit Nunangat or NunatuKavut. CAP's work includes research, advocacy, and advancing the CAP-Daniels Decision to protect the rights of off-reserve Indigenous peoples, regardless of residence or Indian Act status.

CAP partners with eleven provincial and territorial organizations to address the needs of its urban and rural constituents. Guided by a commitment to dignity, equality, and respect, CAP's vision is to rebuild Nations and promote a high quality of life for all Indigenous peoples.

## B. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The concerns of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities are insufficiently addressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), particularly for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals. Colonization has deeply affected this population, displacing communities, undermining social structures, and reinforcing systemic inequalities in health, housing, and income (Statistics Canada, 2023; Trovato et al., 2022). The residential school system left lasting trauma, including intergenerational PTSD and other disabilities, compounded by inadequate access to culturally relevant mental healthcare (Menzies, 2010). These barriers are particularly acute for those living off-reserve, where services are often inaccessible.

Colonial policies like the Indian Act have marginalized off-reserve Indigenous peoples by denying legal status and associated rights (Newhouse et al., 2014). Despite these challenges, their resilience is evident. Indigenous peoples living off-reserve experience higher disability rates than the non-Indigenous population due to this colonial legacy (Hahmann et al., 2019). Structural barriers, including discrimination and inaccessible education and employment opportunities, further impede financial independence and quality of life (Statistics Canada, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2023).

Addressing these issues requires culturally sensitive, holistic approaches that acknowledge colonial history and prioritize Indigenous identity. Improvements in housing, education, healthcare, and equal access to disability benefits are essential to fostering self-determination and reducing systemic inequalities.

This shadow report, informed by extensive research and community engagement, identifies key issues and recommendations. While there are overlaps between CRPD themes and Articles, this discussion highlights

critical areas such as financial stability, social inclusion, housing, mental health, education, and healthcare, emphasizing the need for culturally inclusive solutions.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

CAP is committed to improving the socio-economic conditions of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous persons with disabilities. These challenges encompass substantial barriers to accessing services, particularly those that focus on disability-related barriers and outcomes. These barriers frequently impede access to healthcare, education, employment and social support systems. The barriers are particularly pronounced for off-reserve and non-status Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals because of intersecting forms of discrimination. CAP is dedicated to deepening its understanding of these challenges through detailed research initiatives that inform advocacy and policy development.

CAP undertook a comprehensive study titled *Empowering Voices: Supporting Off-Reserve and Non-Status Indigenous Peoples with Disabilities Through Culturally Inclusive Solutions*. This study was designed to gain a better understanding of the experiences of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples living with disabilities across the country. It specifically focused on women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals. Furthermore, the research utilized quantitative analysis of existing data sources and qualitative methods to better understand their lived experiences and challenges and assess the impact of accessibility and service gaps on this demographic.

This report draws on extensive community and academic research and is guided by contributions from community members and CAP affiliates. This final shadow report presents an objective evaluation and underscores discrepancies in official reports. The study provides a foundational analysis of the current landscape, identifies gaps in service provision, and proposes actionable recommendations. The collaborative nature of this report ensures that a diverse range of perspectives and experiences are considered, enhancing the inclusivity and relevance of CAP's recommendations.

Research carried out by CAP addressed the following key questions:

What are the current needs and challenges faced by off-reserve Indigenous persons with disabilities across Canada, including access to services, healthcare, education, employment, and social support systems?

What specific barriers do off-reserve women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals living with disabilities encounter, and how do these intersect with other forms of marginalization?

What gaps exist between off-reserve Indigenous persons with disabilities and non-Indigenous persons in accessing these services, benefits, and supports?

What are the direct and indirect correlations or causations between socio-economic outcomes and the availability of services for Indigenous persons with disabilities, covering areas such as education participation, attendance, attainment, labour market participation, shelters, income, and health? What similarities and differences can be observed when comparing these impacts with those experienced by other QTBIPOC individuals?

Are these correlations reflected in the latest relevant data sources, such as surveys and administrative data on off-reserve Indigenous persons with disabilities in Canada?

What initial recommendations can be made from these data-driven findings, potentially including ways to improve accessibility and availability of services and supports for off-reserve Indigenous persons with disabilities?

What are the applicable and published recommendations from various organizations, agencies, providers, tables, bodies, and municipalities across Canada, particularly those related to culturally responsive and holistic approaches?

What are the next steps for further data-driven research to better understand the needs and challenges of off-reserve Indigenous persons with disabilities?

This shadow report is based on a comprehensive review of feedback provided by participants in CAP's engagement session, Empowering Voices: Engagement on CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) and Indigenous Persons with Disabilities. It also includes information gathered in CAP's survey, Empowering Voices: Supporting Off-Reserve and Non-Status Indigenous Peoples with Disabilities Through Culturally Inclusive Solutions, which focused on the CRPD. This shadow report summarizes the findings, discussions, and recommendations identified and received during these CRPD engagement sessions.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

CAP's engagement involved research and dialogue with people with disabilities and caregivers for a person(s) living with a disability. Engagement consisted of learning about the unique experiences and challenges to understand better the socioeconomic outcomes of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples living with disabilities. The focus of the survey was not just to collect data but to pave the way for significant improvements in rights, legislation, and regulations for off-reserve Indigenous peoples living with disabilities. This survey collected information on the following: age; gender identity; Indigenous identification (First Nations; Métis, Inuit); identification within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community; place of residence (urban, rural, remote area); identification as non-status or off-reserve; and identification with another ethnicity. Regarding education and employment, individuals were asked if they have ever attended school (high school, college, CEGP, or university) and whether they had access to education that accommodates their disability. Questions addressed the challenges faced in pursuing education as an individual with a disability and what supports have been received.

The survey was meticulously designed to be inclusive, ensuring that all aspects of the participants' lives were considered. This approach was taken to ensure that every participant felt valued and considered. Regarding employment, survey participants were asked to identify their current employment status and whether their workplace was inclusive and accommodating. On the topic of financial stability, individuals indicated the effect of their disability on their financial stability and whether they receive disability benefits or other financial support. The survey included an opportunity to highlight any additional financial matters and supports that would help improve their quality of life. Questions around connection and support in the community were asked, and whether individuals felt connected to their parents, siblings, and family members. On the topic of relationships, the question of how disability/disabilities affect sexual relationships, spirituality, or social relationships was asked.

When addressing disability-specific questions, participants were asked to share whether they identified with having a disability that was related to physical, sensory, intellectual, developmental, mental health, chronic illness, neurological, Option 81, or other. The survey was meticulously designed to respect the diverse identities of the participants, ensuring that everyone felt respected and acknowledged. Information was also shared about how long the individual has lived with the disability and whether they can access healthcare services that meet their specific needs (including HIV-related care and mental health services). Other questions explored whether they faced barriers to accessing healthcare services due to their disability, identity, or where they live. Participants were asked if they were well-informed to consent if they required a medical procedure. If someone else was providing consent on their behalf (authorized caretaker), they were asked to indicate if this was made possible. When addressing culturally specific care, individuals were asked if they have ever received treatment from an Indigenous doctor or nurse and if the healthcare services respect their identity and needs.

## 1.2 SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

### Types of Disabilities Identified

The survey responses from CAP underscore the intricate web of disabilities experienced by off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples living with disabilities. These disabilities, which include physical health, mental health, chronic, sensory, and invisible conditions, often intersect, creating a complex array of daily challenges

and barriers to accessing services. Recognizing and addressing this intersection is crucial in developing policies and services that can effectively meet the multifaceted needs of Indigenous individuals living with disabilities and their caregivers.

Physical Disabilities, including mobility impairments, arthritis, and chronic pain, were frequently reported. Many respondents also noted vision-related disabilities, such as low vision, glaucoma, and cataracts, as well as hearing impairments, tinnitus, and deafness. These conditions underscore the vital importance of not just accessible infrastructure and assistive technologies but also the creation of inclusive public spaces that cater to the needs of all individuals.

Mental Health Disabilities, particularly anxiety disorders like generalized anxiety disorder and social anxiety disorder, emerged as a significant category. This underscores the pressing need for mental health services that are not only trauma-informed but also culturally aligned with Indigenous practices.

Chronic Illnesses, including diabetes, asthma, and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), were also prevalent and often co-occurring with physical and mental health conditions. Chronic pain conditions like fibromyalgia underscore the long-term effects of these illnesses on daily living and well-being.

Invisible Disabilities, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and sleep disorders, were noted alongside conditions such as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). These disabilities underscore the need for greater recognition and accommodation in education and employment, where inclusivity is crucial.

Sensory Disabilities and other specific conditions, including hearing impairments, visual impairments and substance use disorders, also represent the diversity within the survey population.

### 1.3 CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (CRPD)

The CRPD is a collaborative effort to protect the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities. It prevents discrimination and ensures the safety of persons with disabilities so that they are treated equally. Canada's ongoing collaboration with Indigenous persons with disabilities and their caregivers, advocates, and other stakeholders, including communities and guardians, is crucial to implementing this work. The concerns of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities are insufficiently reflected in the CRPD due to several intersecting challenges, such as the lack of cultural sensitivity in the CRPD's Articles and the failure to consider the unique needs of Indigenous persons with disabilities.

While the CRPD recognizes intersectional discrimination, including challenges faced by Indigenous peoples with disabilities, it does not sufficiently address their unique needs. The lack of explicit articulation of Indigenous disability concerns (e.g., cultural accessibility and the right to traditional knowledges) in the CRPD limits the convention's utility for addressing specific realities. This lack of cultural sensitivity can make Indigenous peoples with disabilities feel that their unique needs are not fully understood or respected (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2022).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) emphasizes cultural and territorial rights critical to Indigenous communities. UNDRIP clearly emphasizes the necessity for state attention to Indigenous persons with disabilities, but this is not operationalized in the CRPD, leading to gaps in applying these frameworks cohesively.

Off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples face systemic exclusion in Canada. Federal and provincial programs often overlook this demographic, perpetuating inequities in access to disability services and funding. Programs for Indigenous peoples might not sufficiently address disability-related needs. At the same time, general disability services frequently fail to consider the cultural context and lived experiences of Indigenous peoples.

The lack of comprehensive data on Indigenous peoples with disabilities presents a significant challenge in formulating effective policy responses. A more significant commitment must focus on enhancing understanding of their scope and depth, ensuring that policies are well-informed and responsive (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2022). Advocacy work must align with the CRPD and the UNDRIP to better support off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities. By aligning advocacy work with these international frameworks, we can make a significant impact on the lives of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities.

## 2.0 FINANCIAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

The economic and financial impact of disability on the non-status, off-reserve Indigenous population leads to challenges, such as the lack of employment opportunities, historical injustices, and adequate resources and support. The off-reserve and non-status Indigenous population do not come under some of the federal guidelines, such as those enumerated in the Indian Act, including social assistance and healthcare. There are non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities living off-reserve who are unable to access the essential services and financial supports that status Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people have access to. This leaves them in a financially vulnerable position, especially those with disabilities and the associated expenses that come with it, for instance, medicals, equipment or personal care. This situation is not just a challenge but an apparent injustice that needs to be addressed.

Disability exacerbates the challenges faced by off-reserve and non-status Indigenous people, particularly in the realm of employment. This group not only contends with prejudice due to their Indigenous background but also faces reduced employment opportunities and income resulting from their disability status. Moreover, non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities encounter barriers in accessing vocational training and employment programs that cater to their specific needs.

Among the off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples of Canada, those with disabilities have the highest rates of poverty as compared to Indigenous peoples with status and non-Indigenous peoples. This is due to their lack of proper access to shelter, medical care and other social supports. The impact of disability on non-status, off-reserve Indigenous peoples in Canada for the economy is extensive and complex. To enhance the economic status of this population, urgent and significant policy changes must be directed towards providing more help to those with disabilities and focusing on job creation and healthcare that is culturally appropriate. Your advocacy and support for these policy changes, particularly in culturally appropriate healthcare and job creation, are crucial.

### 2.1 The Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The CRPD does not mention off-reserve and non-status Indigenous people in Canada in a specific manner. However, some CRPD Articles can be applied to address economic issues affecting Indigenous peoples if combined with domestic legal requirements, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Relevant CRPD Articles include:

#### Article 4(3): General Obligations

Persons with disabilities, including off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples, must be involved in forming policies and developing and implementing legislation and guidelines. While the CRPD does not explicitly mention these groups, its implementation in Canadian policies, in line with the UNDRIP and respect for Indigenous sovereignty and rights, can significantly improve their access to federally funded programs and services, including disability support. This presents a hopeful path toward economic justice and inclusivity.

#### Article 5: Equality and Non-Discrimination

Indigenous peoples with disability may also suffer from multiple forms of oppression that directly influence their economic well-being. This Article includes putting measures such as financial support in place to help fight for economic justice and against injustices.

## Article 19: Living Independently and Being Included in the Community

Another important aspect of independence is the availability of sources of financial assistance, attendant care, and community inclusion. This can also include creating appropriate programs for Indigenous peoples not living in their traditional territories.

## Article 27: Work and Employment

This Article aims to ensure that the right to work is respected and, thus, the right to practice any occupation or employment. For example, strategies are needed to prevent workplace discrimination, specific training suitable for Indigenous cultures, and other forms of economic empowerment in urban and rural areas.

## Article 28: Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection

This means the state must ensure that every person has access to enough food, shelter, and other basic needs to improve their quality of life. In the context of Indigenous peoples, this involves providing financial support for the needs of people with disabilities, affordable housing, and poverty mitigation strategies that recognize the needs of Indigenous peoples who live in cities and have lost access to cultural resources.

### 2.2 Considerations for Off-reserve and Non-status Indigenous Peoples:

The Daniels Decision of 2016 established that non-status and Métis peoples came under federal authority, creating a legal basis for demanding disability financial assistance per the CRPD. Federal initiatives like the Accessible Canada Act and provincial disability support programs must also provide culturally appropriate services to off-reserve Indigenous people to realize the CRPD's vision.

### 2.3 Financial Stability and Economic Impact for Individuals with Disabilities

Among off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples living with a disability, the survey responses reveal significant variation in how disability affects financial stability. The most common response, selected by 25% of participants, was that their financial stability is affected "somewhat" by their disability, followed closely by those who reported that their financial situation is impacted "a little." Nearly 40% of respondents reported more extreme effects, with 20% saying that their disability affects their financial stability "very much," while another 20% felt no impact ("not at all"). A smaller but notable group (14%) indicated a moderate, however significant, financial implication, selecting "quite a bit." These findings suggest that among off-reserve Indigenous peoples with disabilities, financial security varies widely and is influenced by individual circumstances, community support, and the adequacy of government resources. It is crucial to recognize the intersection of Indigeneity, disability, and financial security in the context of Canadian applications for the CRPD, as it significantly impacts the lives of these individuals.

Qualitative responses further emphasize the shortcomings of current disability benefits in meeting basic living costs and addressing the unique needs of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous individuals with disabilities, particularly in areas like food, rent, and healthcare. Many respondents explicitly cited the inadequacy of existing benefits, with several requesting the establishment of a "basic income" or "tax-free monthly payments." These respondents often highlighted the challenge of managing their disabilities while attempting to provide for themselves and, in some cases, for family dependents. For instance, one respondent noted the compounded stress of supporting "three young children," revealing the multifaceted nature of financial burdens faced by off-reserve Indigenous persons living with disabilities. This theme consistently points to a critical gap in existing financial support systems, suggesting an urgent and immediate need for expanded benefits and policies that provide a more comprehensive economic safety net.

### 2.4 Financial Stability and Economic Impact for Caregivers

For caregivers, their role's economic impact is significant and varied. In the quantitative results, caregivers showed a relatively even distribution in the severity of the financial strain, with 29% indicating "quite a bit" of impact, 29% reporting "not at all," and 29% experiencing the financial impact "very much." This spread reveals that caregiving can impose a substantial financial strain or have a minimal economic impact, likely depending on other support systems and personal resources available to the caregiver. A smaller proportion (14%) selected "somewhat," suggesting moderate financial pressure. Caregivers consistently highlighted the economic sacrifices and financial strain associated with caregiving. Many reported difficulties balancing employment with caregiving responsibilities, with some choosing to reduce work hours or forego career advancement opportunities to provide full-time care. This reduction in earning potential, combined with the added costs of caregiving, places substantial pressure on caregivers. Several respondents advocated for more robust financial support measures, such as "monthly stipends" or specific subsidies to cover essential needs like housing, healthcare, and dietary expenses. This shows the urgent need for caregiver-specific financial support policies that reflect the economic impact and responsibilities associated with caregiving.

### 3.0 SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Disability influences the social and community support systems for the off-reserve and non-status Indigenous people in Canada, as they are excluded from accessing appropriate services and communities. These problems are due to historical colonialism, discrimination, and fragmentation of federal and provincial policies. Off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities are often unable to find what they need in terms of services that are sensitive to culture and community. Despite these challenges, the resilience of these individuals is inspiring. While the status First Nations peoples living on reserves can benefit from the federal programs and services around healthcare and social support offered by the Indian Act, non-status people cannot. The provincial systems expected to provide these services do not have mechanisms for understanding cultural needs. This can intensify the feelings of isolation, especially for off-reserve Indigenous peoples who are unable to integrate into their traditional communities and the large families that provide their primary emotional and social support. Living in urban areas, many face difficulties developing or enhancing their sociability because of physical limitations, transport problems, and the lack of Indigenous non-governmental organizations. Indigenous peoples with disabilities are also affected by multiple forms of prejudice because they are Indigenous and because they are individuals living with disabilities. These multiple stigmas make engaging with the community and the programs difficult. The systemic racism that may stem from mainstream service providers is a significant barrier, leading many Indigenous peoples to avoid seeking help or being part of specific activities.

The division of powers between the federal and the provincial governments poses a challenge in service delivery for off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples. This means that there is limited housing provision, disability-related assistance and community-based healthcare, which puts this group in a disadvantaged situation. The urgency of the problem is apparent, as there needs to be more urban centers with Indigenous-specific organizations that can help with disability-related issues. CAP's provincial affiliates that try to meet this need are often challenged when addressing the needs of the people they serve. They are generally underfunded, meaning many people need more community assistance. These issues can only be solved if there is a policy change, an increase in funding for urban Indigenous organizations, and an improvement in the delivery of services with a focus on cultural competency. The need for these changes is urgent and cannot be overstated, as they would go a long way in addressing this group's needs and ensuring they are well included.

#### 3.1 Applying the Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

While the CRPD does not explicitly mention Indigenous peoples or their cultures, several articles are directly relevant to off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities in Canada. These principles and specific CRPD Articles can effectively advocate for policy adjustments for this group, making the CRPD a crucial tool in addressing their needs.

#### Article 19: Living Independently and Being Included in the Community

Article 19 of the CRPD underscores the right of people with disabilities to lead independent lives and be active members of society. It also mandates that the State ensure the availability of community support services and personal assistance to prevent isolation or segregation. For off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples, this means adequate support and support that respects and reflects their unique cultural needs.

#### Article 21: Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

Article 21 of the CRPD focuses on access to information in accessible formats, which can significantly assist the off-reserve Indigenous population in identifying available community services and programs. To ensure this population is well informed about their rights, it is crucial to implement effective communication plans that cater to their specific needs.

#### Article 26: Habilitation and Rehabilitation

Article 26 recommends extensive habilitation and rehabilitation services and programs that encourage the total inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community. For non-status Indigenous peoples, the following could include specialized services which meet the cultural requirements of the population and address the gaps in community-based supports, which are usually compounded by historical exclusion and oppression.

#### Article 28: Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection

Article 28 highlights the need for the State to ensure that social protection programs and services are provided and expanded to include assistance with disability-related expenses. For off-reserve Indigenous peoples, who are excluded from the federal programs available to status Indigenous peoples, this Article underlines the need to extend the support systems that help in combating poverty and marginalization.

#### Article 30: Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure, and Sport

Article 30 states that persons with disabilities should be able to participate in cultural and community life. For Indigenous peoples, this could include provisions that include traditional cultural activities and enhance the link between Indigenous people and their culture and identity, including those living off the reserve.

### 3.2 Considerations for Off-reserve and Non-status Indigenous Peoples

While the CRPD provides a foundational structure, it must be applied to Canada's commitments under domestic legislation and other international treaties to address the unique needs of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples. To effectively meet these provisions, it is crucial to implement culturally appropriate interventions that embrace traditional knowledges, acknowledge historical injustices, and provide equal opportunities for service uptake. It is important to advocate for a more inclusive interpretation and application of the CRPD by Canada, one that considers the situation of Indigenous peoples with disabilities. This includes closing the financing and program delivery gaps and ensuring the community's active involvement.

### 3.3 Social and Community Support for Individuals Living with Disabilities

Survey responses reveal significant variability in feelings of community support and connection among individuals with disabilities. The largest group of respondents (29%) reported feeling "somewhat" connected or supported, while 17% each felt "very much" supported, "a little" supported, or "not at all" supported. This distribution highlights a moderate level of community engagement, but a sizable percentage experienced limited support, suggesting barriers to full community inclusion.

Qualitative insights emphasize the desire among respondents for culturally meaningful community engagement. Many requested accessible and inclusive community events centred on cultural practices, mental health support, and social inclusion. Respondents expressed that these community gatherings ideally incorporate traditional Indigenous elements, such as ceremonies, language support, and culturally specific resources. One participant

highlighted the need for a “nursing home that’s culturally appropriate,” reflecting a broader issue of inadequate culturally responsive care in social and healthcare settings. These responses illustrate a significant need for community programs that not only accommodate disabilities but also respect and affirm Indigenous cultural practices, fostering a sense of belonging and support.

### 3.4 Social and Community Support for Caregivers

Caregivers need more tailored resources to support them fully in their roles. While 29% feel “somewhat” connected in their communities, and 19% feel “very much” connected, a significant portion (14%) feel “a little” connected. This suggests that many caregivers require more specific and targeted support.

In the qualitative feedback, caregivers underscored the importance of culturally inclusive resources for themselves and those they care for. Many noted that existing support systems often overlook cultural and caregiving needs, leading to a sense of isolation. Caregivers advocated for more Indigenous-centered support systems and gatherings, expressing the value of shared experiences with others in similar situations. This theme highlights the crucial need for more Indigenous-led caregiver support networks where cultural identity and caregiving challenges are understood and respected.

## 4.0 HOUSING AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Disability is a pressing factor that significantly impacts the housing and living conditions of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples in Canada. It exacerbates overcrowding, affordability, and substandard housing issues and creates a housing crisis that demands immediate attention. These problems stem from systemic obstacles, policy exclusions, and the effects of poverty and bias.

Off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities face a severe shortage of suitable and affordable housing, which significantly increases their risk of housing instability and homelessness. The need for special housing that is both appropriate and inexpensive is not met in the urban settings where most off-reserve Indigenous peoples live. This, coupled with the higher risk of unemployment and low income among people with disabilities, creates a challenging environment for finding a home.

The shortage of adequate housing is one of the most significant obstacles that hinder the full participation of Indigenous peoples with disabilities. Many rental properties and social housing lack facilities for people with limited mobility and other disability-related needs. This results in people living in substandard houses that not only worsen their health complications but also isolate them from the rest of the community (National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2017).

Non-status Indigenous peoples, including those with disabilities, are more likely to live in overcrowded and substandard housing due to affordability challenges. These conditions not only pose physical health risks but also significantly worsen mental health issues for individuals with disabilities. Overcrowding, a common coping strategy for high housing costs, can create unsafe living environments, further exacerbating the mental health impact (The Health Foundation, 2022).

Non-status Indigenous peoples living off-reserve are often excluded from federal housing programs designed for status First Nations and Inuit peoples. This exclusion leaves them dependent on underfunded provincial or municipal systems that are not tailored to their unique needs. Disability-related supports, such as home modifications, are also inconsistently available across provinces, further marginalizing this population. The intersection of poverty, disability, and non-status Indigenous identity exacerbates housing insecurity. Indigenous peoples with disabilities often experience financial instability due to limited access to employment and social assistance, making it difficult to afford housing or maintain existing accommodations (National Disability Institute, 2020).

Addressing the housing and living conditions of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities requires significant policy reform. This includes increasing the availability of accessible and affordable housing,

expanding eligibility for housing programs, and ensuring culturally relevant supports that address the unique challenges faced by this population. Coordinated efforts across federal, provincial, and municipal governments are essential to reduce disparities and improve living conditions.

#### 4.1 The Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The CRPD includes several Articles that address housing and living conditions, which apply to off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities. While the CRPD does not explicitly mention Indigenous populations, its principles and articles establish a framework for addressing housing issues related to accessibility, affordability, and adequate living standards.

##### Article 6: Women with Disabilities

Indigenous women with disabilities confront distinct and heightened hurdles in the realm of housing insecurity. Article 6 of the CRPD underscores the State's need to address these unique risks and disadvantages, guaranteeing access to safe and accessible housing.

##### Article 9: Accessibility

This Article calls on States to eliminate barriers that hinder accessibility to public and private facilities, including housing. It requires the development of standards and guidelines to ensure that housing and related infrastructure are accessible to persons with disabilities.

##### Article 19: Living Independently and Being Included in the Community

For Indigenous peoples living off-reserve, the need for culturally relevant and accessible housing solutions is urgent. This would ensure physical accessibility and promote social inclusion and community inclusion, reflecting the diversity of society.

##### Article 26: Habilitation and Rehabilitation

Article 26 of the CRPD underscores the significance of comprehensive services that foster independence and full participation in society. In the context of housing, this Article highlights the need for accessible modifications and supportive programs that aid individuals in maintaining their living conditions, ensuring a holistic approach to disability support.

##### Article 28: Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection

This Article emphasizes the right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing, and housing. It obligates states to ensure access to disability-related services, housing support, and programs that reduce poverty. For off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples, this highlights the need for equitable access to housing programs that address the barriers of affordability and accessibility.

#### 4.2 Considerations for Off-reserve and Non-status Indigenous Peoples

The CRPD Articles advocate for inclusive housing policies and programs, but systemic barriers and jurisdictional divides in Canada limit the applicability of these rights for non-status Indigenous peoples. Advocacy for implementing these provisions should focus on addressing housing inequities, creating accessible and culturally appropriate housing, and ensuring that provincial and federal governments collaborate to meet the needs of this population. While the CRPD provides a strong framework, its effectiveness for Indigenous peoples depends on the intersection of disability rights with UNDRIP, which stresses the importance of self-determination and cultural integrity. Aligning CRPD and UNDRIP principles has the potential to create holistic policies that can significantly improve the housing situation for off-reserve Indigenous peoples with disabilities.

### 4.3 Housing and Living Conditions for Individuals with Disabilities

Housing stability and accessibility are not just concerns but pressing problems among respondents. The survey revealed that 63% of individuals with disabilities own their homes, while 35% rent and 2% live in shelters or transitional housing. However, the stark reality is that 27% face housing challenges “sometimes,” and 18% “always” face issues due to accessibility and affordability. These figures underscore an urgent housing gap, with many respondents struggling to find suitable living arrangements.

The qualitative responses serve as a stark reminder of the inadequacies of current housing policies. Many respondents highlighted the lack of accommodations for their disabilities in their homes and the financial burden of making these modifications. The repeated requests for “affordable and safe housing” and subsidies for housing modifications underscore the urgent need for policy reform in housing support for individuals with disabilities. One respondent’s statement, “I cannot afford the costs of accessible housing,” further emphasizes the need for expanded and financially accessible housing resources, especially in less adaptable housing infrastructures.

### 4.4 Housing and Living Conditions for Caregivers

Caregivers, too, are not immune to the challenges of securing suitable housing for themselves and those they care for. The data reveals that caregivers often encounter barriers to accessible housing, with many reporting sporadic challenges. These barriers are usually rooted in financial and structural limitations in existing housing, where accessibility features may be lacking or come at a high cost. In qualitative responses, caregivers discussed the need for housing options that accommodate their caregiving responsibilities and the specific needs of individuals with disabilities. Several strongly advocated for government-supported housing modifications and subsidies to make their living spaces more adaptable to caregiving demands. This feedback highlights a gap in housing policy, where caregivers require resources to provide adequate, safe, and comfortable environments for those in their care, highlighting the need for policy reform.

## 5.0 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Disability has a profound impact on the mental health and well-being of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities caused by systemic inequities. These systemic inequities refer to the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, poverty, and social exclusion, which are deeply rooted in historical and ongoing colonial practices. This intersection of disability, marginalization, and colonial legacies creates unique challenges for this population. Non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities often encounter dual stigma stemming from both their identity and their disabilities. This can lead to heightened isolation, particularly in urban areas lacking strong cultural and community connections. Disconnection from traditional practices and support networks, coupled with systemic racism, further intensifies mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety.

Off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples face significant barriers to accessing mental healthcare, including jurisdictional gaps between federal and provincial services. These gaps often render individuals ineligible for federally funded programs available to them. The urgency of this issue is underscored by the fact that mainstream mental health services usually fail to incorporate cultural healing practices, making them less effective for Indigenous peoples. We must address these barriers and ensure equitable access to mental healthcare for all Indigenous peoples. This is not just a matter of policy but a question of fairness and justice that demands our immediate attention.

Indigenous healing practices often involve community-based approaches, land-based healing, and traditional ceremonies, which are not just vital but urgent for addressing mental health. However, off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples frequently struggle to access such culturally appropriate care, further affecting their overall well-being. Addressing these challenges requires not just including Indigenous perspectives in mental healthcare and ensuring equitable access to services but also prioritizing the incorporation of cultural healing practices to

reduce systemic exclusions and to provide cultural sensitivity in mental healthcare.

## 5.1 Relevant Provisions in the CRPD

The CRPD, with its provisions that emphasize the rights of individuals with disabilities to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, live independently, and participate fully in their communities, offers a promising framework. While it does not explicitly address the unique experiences of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples, its principles and articles hold the potential to be applied effectively to address the mental health challenges of this population, instilling a sense of hope and optimism.

### Article 6: Women with Disabilities

Recognizing the specific challenges faced by women with disabilities, Article 6 calls for measures to ensure their full development, advancement, and empowerment. Indigenous women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges due to gender-based violence and systemic discrimination, making this provision not just pertinent but urgent and crucial (United Nations Office, 2008).

### Article 19: Living Independently and Being Included in the Community

Article 19 underscores the crucial role of social inclusion and community integration for persons with disabilities. This is particularly significant in the context of mental health, as a lack of community support and social isolation can significantly worsen mental health challenges. The disconnection from traditional networks often experienced by off-reserve Indigenous peoples makes this provision especially relevant and deserving of our understanding, highlighting the importance of these factors in mental health.

### Article 24: Education

Ensuring access to inclusive education for persons with disabilities includes providing mental health support within educational systems. For off-reserve Indigenous peoples, this could address the mental health needs of students facing intersectional barriers (barriers that result from the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, such as race, gender, and disability).

### Article 25: Health

This Article acknowledges the right of persons with disabilities to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination. It mandates states to provide health services tailored to meet disability-related needs, including mental healthcare. For non-status Indigenous peoples, this provision underscores the urgent need for culturally safe and accessible mental health services that can effectively address their unique challenges.

### Article 26: Habilitation and Rehabilitation

This Article calls for comprehensive programs, including mental health rehabilitation, to promote inclusion and improve well-being. For Indigenous peoples with disabilities, programs that include traditional healing practices such as smudging, sweat lodges, or talking circles with mainstream mental health support align with the spirit of this Article.

### Article 28: Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection

Poverty and economic insecurity are significant contributors to poor mental health. This Article emphasizes access to social protection programs and services to improve living conditions, indirectly supporting mental health and well-being.

## 5.2 Considerations for Off-reserve and Non-status Indigenous Peoples

While these CRPD provisions provide a strong framework for addressing mental health, their application to off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples in Canada requires consideration of additional barriers. These barriers include jurisdictional gaps, often leading to a lack of coordination and funding for mental health services and culturally appropriate care. Aligning the CRPD with UNDRIP can strengthen efforts to address the intersection of disability, mental health, and Indigenous identity. Addressing the mental health impacts on this population is not just a matter of providing services but necessitates a culturally grounded and rights-based approach. This approach is crucial as it ensures equitable access to services, combats stigma, and supports community-based solutions, thereby underlining its importance in the context of off-reserve Indigenous peoples with disabilities.

### 5.3 Mental Health and Well-Being for Individuals with Disabilities

The survey data underscore a pressing and significant mental health impact for off-reserve Indigenous with disabilities. A substantial portion of respondents, 34%, reported that their disability affects their mental health “somewhat,” while 23% noted a “very much” impact. A smaller percentage reported effects “quite a bit” (20%) and “a little” (14%). Only 9% of respondents indicated no impact, suggesting that mental health challenges are nearly universal among Indigenous individuals living with disabilities.

Qualitative responses underscore the glaring inadequacy of current mental health services, particularly those that are culturally informed. Many respondents expressed frustration at the lack of access to mental health professionals familiar with Indigenous knowledge systems or those who are attuned to the intersections of disability and Indigenous identity. Numerous off-reserve Indigenous peoples expressed a desire for mental health resources that include traditional Indigenous healing practices, such as access to a “traditional Indigenous doctor” or “natural medicine.” This preference reflects a deep cultural need that current mental health services often overlook. The desire for culturally responsive and holistic mental health services underscores the need for Indigenous-centered mental health policies that support culturally meaningful approaches to well-being.

### 5.4 Mental Health and Well-Being for Caregivers

Caregivers are not immune to the significant mental health challenges that come with their roles. Survey responses reveal that 24% of caregivers experience a “somewhat” effect on their mental health, with 19% affected “very much” and 14% “quite a bit.” These figures underscore the dual nature of caregiving, which brings personal fulfillment but also imposes substantial emotional and psychological strain.

Qualitative responses from caregivers reveal a pressing need for mental health resources that recognize the unique pressures of caregiving. Many caregivers expressed interest in support groups or peer networks to connect with others facing similar challenges. This indicates that shared experiences and community-based support may be valuable for caregivers, fostering mutual understanding and resilience. Additionally, caregivers requested counselling resources that acknowledge both off-reserve Indigenous peoples and caregiving contexts, suggesting that standard mental health services may not adequately address their specific stressors. The response reveals a significant gap in mental health services that, if filled, could have a profound impact on the well-being of caregivers.

## 6.0 EDUCATION ACCESS AND EMPLOYMENT

The impact of disability on the education and employment of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples in Canada is a pressing issue, exacerbating existing inequities due to systemic discrimination. The lack of culturally relevant support further compounds these challenges, underscoring the importance of respecting and including Indigenous cultures in support systems. These barriers limit opportunities for personal and economic advancement and demand immediate attention. Education systems often fail to provide culturally relevant content or accommodations for disabilities. Many Indigenous students with disabilities require support, such as accessible classrooms, specialized instruction, and inclusive environments. However, schools often lack the necessary funding and training to address these needs, leading to higher dropout rates and lower academic

achievement (National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2017).

While beneficial to status First Nations peoples living on reserves, the current federal education programs do not extend to non-status individuals or those living off-reserve. This systemic exclusion underscores the urgent need for comprehensive changes that would ensure equal access to educational funding and support services for all Indigenous peoples. Many are left reliant on underfunded provincial systems. Poverty, a significant barrier for Indigenous peoples, particularly those with disabilities, further highlights the need for systemic change. Limited financial resources can hinder access to post-secondary education and technical training, further marginalizing non-status individuals.

Indigenous peoples with disabilities face compounded discrimination based on ethnicity and disability status, yet they continue to persevere with remarkable resilience. Despite the lower employment rates and limited access to meaningful, well-paid jobs, they demonstrate resilience in these challenges. Employers often fail to accommodate persons with disabilities, such as modified work environments or flexible schedules. This can lead to underemployment or exclusion from the labour market.

Many non-status Indigenous peoples living off-reserve are excluded from federally funded employment programs designed for on-reserve populations. Vocational training and employment support services are often inadequate or unavailable, particularly in rural and remote areas where some non-status individuals reside.

Indigenous women with disabilities face additional challenges in accessing employment, including higher rates of workplace discrimination and a lack of childcare support. These factors disproportionately impact their ability to secure stable jobs (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2020). The intersection of disability, limited education, and restricted employment opportunities perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion among non-status Indigenous peoples. These challenges exacerbate health disparities, reduce access to essential services, and undermine overall well-being.

## 6.1 Relevant Provisions in the CRPD

The CRPD includes several provisions that are directly relevant and address barriers in education and employment for off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities in Canada. While the CRPD does not explicitly reference Indigenous populations, its broad commitments to equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion can be applied to their unique circumstances, making this information highly applicable.

### Article 5: Equality and Non-Discrimination

This Article highlights the obligation to eliminate discrimination and promote equal access to education for persons with disabilities. For non-status Indigenous peoples, this is crucial as they often face compounded discrimination based on disability, ethnicity, and geographic location.

### Article 9: Accessibility

Accessibility provisions extend to employment settings, ensuring that workplaces, job training facilities, and employment services are accessible to persons with disabilities. This is vital for Indigenous peoples with disabilities who may already face limited options in rural or urban areas.

### Article 24: Education

This Article emphasizes the rights of persons with disabilities to access inclusive, quality, and free education at all levels. It requires equal educational opportunities, reasonable accommodations to meet individual learning needs, and support services, such as trained teachers and accessible materials, to facilitate effective education. For off-reserve Indigenous peoples, this Article underscores the need for culturally relevant and accessible education systems, such as language immersion programs and traditional knowledge-based curricula, to support their distinct needs.

## Article 26: Habilitation and Rehabilitation

Habilitation refers to learning or relearning skills necessary for daily living, while rehabilitation focuses on restoring lost skills or developing new ones. These programs should enable persons with disabilities to develop employment-related skills. This Article aligns with the need for targeted initiatives to assist Indigenous individuals in entering and succeeding in the workforce.

## Article 27: Work and Employment

This Article addresses the right to work for persons with disabilities. It calls for non-discriminatory hiring practices, equal pay for work of equal value, accessibility and reasonable accommodations in workplaces, access to vocational training, career advancement opportunities, and employment support services. This highlights the importance of eliminating barriers to equitable employment opportunities and creating culturally relevant vocational training programs for off-reserve Indigenous peoples.

## Article 28: Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection

Economic stability is integral to employment. This article emphasizes the right to social protection and poverty reduction programs, including financial support, subsidies, and initiatives to address employment barriers.

## Article 30: Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure, and Sport

This Article indirectly supports education by advocating for the inclusion of cultural elements in learning. Incorporating traditional knowledges and cultural practices into education can improve engagement and outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

## 6.2 Considerations for Off-reserve and Non-status Indigenous Peoples

The CRPD provides a robust framework for addressing education and employment barriers. However, systemic gaps and jurisdictional exclusions often leave non-status Indigenous peoples needing access to federal programs. Collaboration between federal, provincial, and Indigenous organizations is essential for practical implementation. It holds the potential for significant positive change in addressing disparities and upholding the rights outlined in the CRPD.

## 6.3 Education and Employment for Individuals with Disabilities

The survey results indicate that access to inclusive education remains limited for Off-reserve Indigenous Peoples living with disabilities. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) report having “never” had access to specific educational accommodations such as assistive technologies, extra time for exams, or accessible learning materials. Only 17% received consistent support (“always”). Smaller percentages received accommodations sporadically, with 15% reporting access “sometimes,” 11% “often,” and 9% “occasionally.” This data highlights substantial gaps in educational inclusivity and accessibility, suggesting that many Indigenous students with disabilities may be unable to realize their full potential in academic environments.

Qualitative responses highlight specific barriers encountered in educational settings. Respondents frequently noted the lack of accessible materials, insufficient individual support, and, for some, a feeling of exclusion due to their disabilities. The absence of Indigenous representation in the curriculum and faculty was also mentioned, contributing to a sense of alienation and cultural disconnection in educational spaces. These barriers extend beyond physical accommodations, underscoring the need for a holistic and culturally inclusive approach to academic policies. A framework that incorporates Indigenous perspectives, supports individualized learning, and addresses accessibility needs could significantly improve educational experiences for Indigenous students with disabilities.

## 6.4 Education and Employment for Caregivers

Though quantitative data on educational experiences is limited for caregivers, qualitative responses indicate that caregivers often face challenges supporting the academic journeys of the individuals they care for. We understand many caregivers' frustration with the school systems' lack of resources and accommodations. We also hear about advocacy for resources such as Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Indigenous student support centers. This need for culturally attuned educational support for individuals with disabilities underscores the critical and often overlooked role caregivers play in navigating academic environments on behalf of those they support. The feedback suggests that caregivers may benefit from additional resources and training to effectively advocate for educational accommodations, promoting an environment where Indigenous individuals with disabilities can thrive academically.

## 7.0 HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND QUALITY

Systemic barriers and jurisdictional issues significantly worsen the health outcomes of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities in Canada. These issues and the lack of culturally safe and inclusive services make accessing quality healthcare a significant challenge. Unlike status First Nations and Inuit peoples, non-status individuals are not eligible for federally funded health programs such as the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program. This exclusion often leaves them dependent on provincial healthcare systems, which may not provide culturally specific or adequate services for their disability-related needs.

Many off-reserve Indigenous peoples live in urban or rural areas with limited access to specialized healthcare services, including disability-specific treatments and rehabilitation. Rural healthcare services are often underfunded and lack accessibility features required by persons with disabilities. Disability usually correlates with economic insecurity, limiting the ability to afford transportation, assistive devices, or out-of-pocket healthcare expenses not covered by provincial health plans. Indigenous peoples frequently report experiencing discrimination in healthcare settings, leading to distrust of medical institutions and delayed care. For those with disabilities, this discrimination may be compounded, increasing the likelihood of unmet medical needs. Mainstream healthcare services must include Indigenous cultural practices, traditional medicines, and community-based approaches.

### 7.1 Relevant Provisions in the CRPD

The CRPD contains several Articles that address healthcare access and quality for persons with disabilities. These provisions, which could be applied to the unique circumstances of off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples, offer hope. While the CRPD does not explicitly mention Indigenous populations, its principles of equality, accessibility, and non-discrimination align with the needs of this group, providing a promising path forward.

#### Article 5: Equality and Non-Discrimination

Article 5 of the CRPD, which calls for equal access to healthcare without discrimination based on disability, is fundamental in addressing the compounded discrimination faced by non-status Indigenous peoples in healthcare settings. This discrimination is often rooted in systemic racism and ableism.

#### Article 6: Women with Disabilities

This provision, which recognizes the unique health challenges faced by women with disabilities and requires states to adopt measures to ensure their full development and empowerment, is of utmost importance. Indigenous women with disabilities often experience intersecting barriers in accessing healthcare, making this Article particularly urgent and significant in efforts to ensure their full health and well-being.

#### Article 9: Accessibility

This Article is relevant as States must ensure accessibility to public services, including healthcare facilities, for persons with disabilities. It encourages the removal of physical, informational, and systemic barriers to

healthcare. This need is particularly acute for Indigenous peoples living off-reserve, who may face additional challenges accessing healthcare services in rural or urban areas.

#### Article 25: Health

This Article recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination. It also emphasizes access to gender-sensitive and disability-specific health services, including prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. Furthermore, it requires states to provide affordable and accessible healthcare for persons with disabilities, including those in underserved areas. For non-status Indigenous peoples, this Article supports the need for culturally safe and accessible healthcare services that address intersecting barriers related to disability and Indigenous identity.

#### Article 26: Habilitation and Rehabilitation

This Article highlights the need for States to provide comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation services to enable persons with disabilities to achieve maximum independence and inclusion. This provision can support the development of programs that include Indigenous cultural practices with disability care.

#### Article 28: Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection

This Article recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living, including access to healthcare and social protection programs. For non-status Indigenous peoples, this aligns with the need to address gaps in healthcare funding and jurisdictional inequities.

### 7.2 Considerations for Off-reserve and Non-status Indigenous Peoples

The CRPD Articles provide a framework for improving healthcare access and quality for all persons with disabilities. Collaboration between federal, provincial, and Indigenous governments is desirable and essential to address the specific needs of non-status Indigenous peoples in Canada. This commitment to collaboration reassures us of the shared goal of bridging jurisdictional gaps and providing equitable access to healthcare.

#### 7.3 Healthcare Access and Quality for Individuals with Disabilities

Access to healthcare services that meet the specific needs of individuals with disabilities remains a significant challenge. Many off-reserve Indigenous peoples living with a disability reported facing considerable barriers to accessing healthcare. Mental health services in rural or remote areas are often limited, with some individuals needing to travel significant distances for specialized care. However, the most urgent issue is the lack of culturally respectful healthcare providers. This pressing matter requires immediate and focused attention to prevent further feelings of isolation and inadequate care.

The qualitative insights emphasize that many Indigenous individuals with disabilities feel misunderstood or marginalized within healthcare settings. Respondents expressed a need for Indigenous-informed healthcare providers who understand the unique challenges at the intersection of disability and Indigenous identity. Several noted that having healthcare services available from Indigenous practitioners or incorporating traditional medicine could bridge the current care gap, promoting cultural safety and inclusivity. These findings underscore the critical need for healthcare policies that integrate Indigenous knowledge and prioritize accessibility, ensuring that off-reserve Indigenous peoples with disabilities receive equitable and respectful care.

#### 7.4 Healthcare Access and Quality for Caregivers

Caregivers encounter distinct challenges in accessing culturally and identity-affirming healthcare for the individuals they support. In qualitative responses, caregivers expressed frustration over the lack of identity-affirming healthcare providers for their loved ones and advocated for more culturally appropriate care options. The need for these options is urgent. Many caregivers shared stories of feeling dismissed or

misunderstood by non-Indigenous healthcare professionals who may need help understanding the cultural dimensions of their caregiving role or the specific needs of Indigenous patients. These responses suggest that improving healthcare services for Indigenous communities should include both caregiver support and identity-affirming practices that are aligned with Indigenous worldviews.

## 8.0 LEGISLATION AND POLICY IMPACTS

Many off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities and their caregivers are grappling with the repercussions of restrictive or insufficient policies. The dissatisfaction with current disability benefits, frequently voiced in qualitative feedback, underscores the issue's urgency. These benefits are perceived as inadequate to cover basic needs, let alone the costs unique to disabilities. Moreover, the absence of culturally relevant programs within the scope of existing policies, such as traditional healing practices, community-based support groups, or language-specific services, further exacerbates the situation. This systemic gap in policies is particularly acute for Indigenous peoples with disabilities, especially those in remote or off-reserve areas.

The feedback suggests that off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities would benefit from more flexible and comprehensive policy frameworks that consider their unique cultural, geographic, and economic contexts. The urgency of these reforms is apparent, as existing legislation can provide increased financial support, more accessible housing, and culturally sensitive social services. The need for Indigenous-centered legislation is clear, as many respondents noted feeling overlooked by policies that inadequately address the intersection of disability and Indigenous identity. These reforms could bring about a more hopeful future for Indigenous peoples with disabilities.

Caregivers similarly reported challenges with current policies, which they feel need more support for the unique responsibilities of caregiving. Many caregivers described existing support as rigid and unsuited to the realities of caregiving for off-reserve and non-status Indigenous individuals with disabilities. For instance, respondents indicated that current disability benefits do not reflect the additional economic and emotional burdens associated with caregiving. Some caregivers advocated for policy reforms recognizing their contributions and providing targeted financial support, such as caregiving stipends or housing subsidies, to offset caregiving costs.

Qualitative responses indicate that policies that explicitly include caregiver needs and respect Indigenous cultural values could significantly enhance the caregiving experience. It is crucial to recognize the vital role of caregivers in these policies, as many expressed a desire for greater government recognition of their role. By acknowledging and valuing caregivers' contributions, expanded policies could ease the strain of caregiving and promote the well-being of caregivers and those they support, making them feel valued and respected.

## 9.0 INTERSECTIONALITY AND DISABILITY

The survey data indicate that intersectional identities, including gender, age, race, and 2SLGBTQIA+ status, have an impact on the experiences of Indigenous peoples with disabilities. In the quantitative analysis, a substantial portion of respondents (43.48%) reported that their intersectional identities had no impact on their access to services, suggesting that some individuals have managed to navigate available resources without significant barriers. However, this figure is contrasted by the 26% who reported that their intersecting identities had "somewhat" of an impact, while 17% reported "a little," and 13% experienced "quite a bit" of an effect. This distribution reflects the diversity of experiences, highlighting the urgent need for policy improvement. However, it is not just policy improvement that's needed, but comprehensive solutions that address the compounded challenges faced by some Indigenous Peoples with disabilities in accessing necessary services and support. Your involvement in finding these solutions is not just important; it is integral to the process. Your unique perspective and expertise are crucial in addressing these challenges.

For caregivers, particularly female caregivers, intersectionality significantly shapes their experiences and access to support. In the qualitative data, many female caregivers highlighted that their intersecting identities, influenced by traditional gender roles and cultural expectations, intensified their responsibilities, often compounding the

emotional and social stressors associated with caregiving. They reported feeling these factors intensified the pressure to provide care, sometimes without adequate support from extended family or community resources. This dynamic was particularly prominent among younger female caregivers, who often face social expectations to balance caregiving with other roles and responsibilities, such as education or employment.

The comprehensive analysis of survey responses underscores the systemic nature of the challenges faced by off-reserve Indigenous peoples living with disabilities and their caregivers. These challenges span financial stability, social support, housing accessibility, mental health, education, healthcare, and intersectional discrimination. The findings highlight critical areas where current systems and policies fall short in meeting the unique needs of Indigenous communities, particularly when compounded by intersecting identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and age. This underscores the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses these challenges across all these domains.

## 10.0 CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This report highlights the systemic barriers faced by off-reserve and non-status Indigenous peoples with disabilities, emphasizing the urgent need for culturally inclusive and equitable solutions. To address these challenges, the following steps are critical:

**Strengthen Financial Support:** Implement flexible financial models, such as enhanced disability benefits and basic income programs, to alleviate poverty and address the additional costs associated with disabilities.

**Promote Accessible and Affordable Housing:** Develop housing policies that prioritize accessibility, affordability, and cultural alignment. This includes subsidies for housing modifications and support for rural and remote communities.

**Expand Culturally Inclusive Mental Health Services:** Integrate traditional Indigenous healing practices into mental health services, ensuring accessibility and cultural sensitivity.

**Enhance Educational and Employment Opportunities:** Advocate for inclusive education policies that provide individualized learning plans and Indigenous representation in curricula. Promote workplace accommodations and culturally relevant vocational training programs.

**Improve Healthcare Access:** Develop Indigenous-informed healthcare systems that integrate traditional medicine with mainstream practices. Prioritize the training of healthcare providers in cultural safety and inclusivity.

**Adopt Intersectional Policy Frameworks:** Design policies that address the compounded challenges of intersecting identities, such as gender, disability, and Indigeneity. Anti-discrimination training for service providers is essential to ensure equitable access.

Moving forward, it is imperative to align these steps with the principles of the CRPD and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). By addressing these systemic inequities, Canada can build a more inclusive and just society where off-reserve Indigenous peoples with disabilities can thrive with dignity and respect. CAP remains committed to advocating for these necessary changes, ensuring the voices of its constituents are heard and their needs met.

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