

## Alternative Models of Development That Support Diverse Women in the North



This fact sheet series is a review and summary of already published work. Sources used are included in the online version, published at [www.criaw-icref.ca/femnorthnet/themes/inclusion](http://www.criaw-icref.ca/femnorthnet/themes/inclusion)

**Many of the current models of service provision and development do not consider the experiences, knowledge, needs, and desires of diverse Northern women.**

Fortunately, there are notable examples where a feminist intersectional approach has been applied to ensure these models are designed in a way that benefits women and respects their diversity. This fact sheet reviews some promising examples that could provide alternative models for women in the North. However, there are few existing models that consider the needs of women with disabilities and migrant women.

### Healthcare

There are alternative healthcare models in the North that account for the needs of diverse women.

- The **Inuulitsivik Midwifery Service and Education Program** (Nunavik) allows Inuit women in 7 fly-in communities to access reproductive care. Trained, local women provide care in 3 communities, reducing pregnancy travel costs, allowing women to stay close to friends and family, and ensuring appropriate cultural and linguistic support. The service allows 80 percent of women to give birth in Nunavik.
- The **Nuka Model of Care** (south-central Alaska) is based in Alaskan native cultural practice and places emphasis on maintenance of health, rather than reactive treatment of illness. Teams of Alaskan native healthcare professionals serve over 50 remote communities, offering same-day appointments and online or phone services for other needs. This model has improved health outcomes in the region, decreased visits to the emergency room by 50 percent and decreased visits to specialists by 65 percent.
- In Manitoba, the University College of the North's **Aboriginal Midwifery Program** was intended to provide local and culturally sensitive care for Northern Manitoba's First Nations. Sadly, it was recently put on hold. However, women in Norway House Cree Nation are increasingly refusing to go south to give birth, and are instead delivering their babies at the local hospital with the assistance of an Aboriginal midwife. Women have cited the continuity of care with a local midwife as a major benefit of this option.

### Caregiving

There are numerous ways that caregiving supports and services in the North could be improved, including through government programs, awareness initiatives, and new technologies.

- The **Sequoia Senior Solutions' Remote Caregiving System** (United States) uses online and telephone systems. Remote care providers communicate with users and their families, monitoring users' health indicators as well as home conditions, and call for emergency services if needed. This is much more affordable than in-home care or nursing homes and allows seniors to continue living independently for longer. With improved infrastructure, this type of model could work for Northern families.

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- In the US, '**Employer Best Practices for Workers with Caregiving Responsibilities**' ensures employers support workers that have caregiving duties and are informed about legislation protecting these workers from discrimination. This might be useful for Northern employers; especially companies founded by migrants from the South who may fail to grasp caregiving realities in the North.
- In Thompson, Manitoba, the University College of the North provides childcare for student parents, the Friendship Centre offers an Aboriginal focus childcare program, and the United Steel Workers' Women of Steel Committee is trying to open additional childcare spaces for Vale Inco employees.

## Education, Employment & Income

There are a number of models available for assisting women in remote regions affected by resource development to access education, employment opportunities, and secure personal income.

- The Justice Institute of British Columbia offers an **Associate Certificate in Aboriginal Leadership** to women in Dease Lake, Northern BC. The program targets women who are not enrolled education or training, are unemployed and not receiving EI benefits, or are employed and low-skilled. The certificate offers an alternative to existing trades-based training and a pathway to university.
- The **PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise** (Thunder Bay, Ontario) aims to build capacity in Northern Ontario women so that they can become entrepreneurs and leaders in their communities' economic development. They offer a number of services including business plan development, access to loans, affordable office space, regional networking and professional training in various areas. PARO has special programming for Indigenous women and young women.
- The **Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association** has been awarded federal government funding to collaborate with community partners, including service agencies, colleges, and businesses, to develop a plan for increasing the employment opportunities for rural immigrant women in central Alberta.

FemNorthNet's [Blueprints Project](#) worked in collaboration with three northern communities (Thompson, MB, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL & Labrador West, NL) to provide workshops and training for diverse women and encouraged their involvement in community decision-making processes around their region's economic development.

## Housing

Housing in the North is complex, complicated by property ownership regulations, maintenance costs, building material availability, cultural considerations and climate. Fortunately, there are potential solutions.

- The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation collaborated with the Nunavut Housing Corporation on the **Northern Sustainable House Project** to create an energy-efficient home design for the North in 2006. Feedback on the cultural appropriateness of the design was specifically sought from women.

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- The Manitoba Government and Swan River Friendship Centre Housing Corporation partnered under the **'HOMEWorks!' housing strategy** to construct affordable, accessible housing for elderly Northern First Nations and Métis residents, allowing them to stay close to friends and family and reducing poverty.
- In Manitoba, the **Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation** lobbies for affordable housing and assists low-income earners with becoming homeowners. Similarly, the women-led **Labrador West Housing and Homelessness Coalition** is considering partnerships with mining companies for housing projects. The provincial **Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Homelessness Network** is working in Happy Valley-Goose Bay to alleviate the housing crisis worsened by the Muskrat Falls development.
- Efforts are being made by women's organizations to expand shelter networks in the North and improve existing shelters. The **'Making Our Shelters Strong' project** provided training to front-line staff in Inuit women's shelters. Many remote communities have created **'safe home networks'** – private homes offering short-term emergency stays for women.



Figure 1: Housing on the military base in Goose Bay, Labrador

## Justice

A number of alternative justice systems have been tested in the North and have had some success.

- **Restorative Justice Programs** are known to lower re-offence rates – partially attributable to community pressure on the offender. Formal court processes can be especially traumatic for Aboriginal people, who have an adverse history with the Canadian legal system. The Aboriginal Women's Action Network is concerned about the unequal gendered power dynamics that can emerge when addressing abuse offences through restorative justice. Ways to eliminate this imbalance have been proposed, such as consultation with women on process design and ensuring the voluntary participation of all parties.
- The **First Nations Policing Program**, in place since 1991, grants federal funding to First Nation and Inuit community police forces. The program is highly valued by Aboriginal communities, for its culturally sensitive services in rural and remote areas in addition to the RCMP forces. Funding was renewed for the program in Canada's Economic Action Plan, but there was no increase to address severe staffing and infrastructure needs, which were recently linked to one Northern woman dying while in custody.

## Food Security

Communities and governments have created innovative legislation and programs to address food security.

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- The **Northern Food Network** connects groups working on food security in Canada's remote and Northern communities. Members network and share information about projects and lessons learned.
- Many Northern communities have **community gardening and greenhouse projects**. These gardens supply fresh, nutritious, and affordable food to communities, help strengthen relationships between members and encourage healthy living. The BC Government subsidizes 17 of these projects through its First Nations Food Systems initiative, providing money to hire at least one garden coordinator.
- **Hunter Support or Harvester Assistance Programs** subsidize the cost of equipment for Aboriginal hunters, fishers, and trappers; the transportation of harvested goods; and may offer an allowance to some harvesters. They primarily benefit men, who are more likely to engage in these types of activities. However, Nunavut has a **Women's Role in Harvesting Program** (Atugaksait Program) that funds women to teach traditional skill sets, such as preparing skins or sewing furs, to others in their communities.

## Transportation

The geography and climate of the North requires creative solutions to build transportation networks.

- The **Community Transportation Assistance Program** (Nova Scotia) provides rural communities with funding to deliver transportation services for groups that traditionally have little access, including those living with disabilities and seniors. Programs are tailored to community needs and capacity. Some services have limited hours, which is not ideal for shift workers, but most are affordable.
- The **Québec North Shore and Labrador Railway** runs on a rail line formerly used for shipping iron ore. The rail line was sold out to an Aboriginal company and repurposed to provide passenger and freight service for remote communities in Northern Québec through to Labrador.

## Telecommunications

With its substantial rural and remote populations, Australia is a good place to look for examples of telecommunications programs and studies that may meet the needs of women in the North.

- The **Indigenous Communications Program** is a program to deliver access to satellite phones, maintain landlines, and create Internet facilities with computer training for remote Australian Indigenous communities. The 2013 review recommended expanding affordable cell phone access and ensuring Internet facilities and training are culturally relevant and accommodate all ages and genders.
- **Women With Disabilities Australia** formed a Telecommunications Group to study women with disabilities' use of telecommunications and to make recommendations to increase accessibility.

The other fact sheets in this "Impacts of Economic Restructuring on Diverse Women in Canada's North" series are available for download on the FemNorthNet website: <http://www.criaw-icref.ca/femnorthnet/themes/inclusion>

<sup>1</sup> "[Goose Bay, Labrador](#)" by [Axel Drainville](#) is licensed by [CC BY-NC 2.0](#)

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