



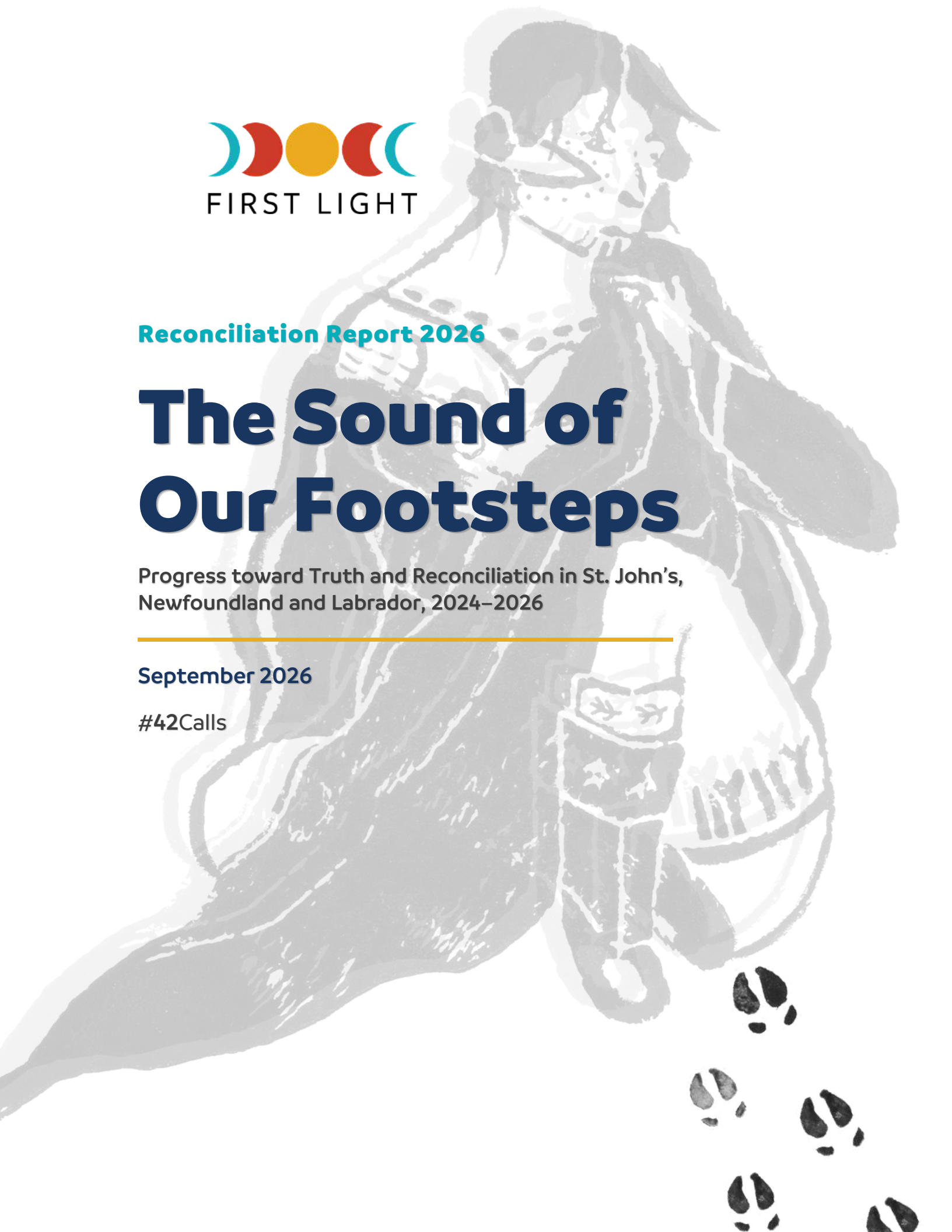
Reconciliation Report 2026

The Sound of Our Footsteps

Progress toward Truth and Reconciliation in St. John's,
Newfoundland and Labrador, 2024–2026

September 2026

#42Calls





About This Document

This Reconciliation Report has been prepared by the First Light Advocacy Team, under the guidance of the First Voice Advocacy Council and with contributions from numerous First Light staff and community members. Content of the report was written and edited by numerous staff contributors, including Teri Slade, Hanushika Thuraijah, Noah Sheppard, Rory Lambert, Marc Humber, Kevin Coffey, Riley Harnett, Chad Bedard, and Justin Campbell. Visual design of the document was created by Hanushika Thuraijah, Kelly Young, and Riley Harnett. Artwork was provided by Juliette Onalik. The poem, "The Urban Inuk", was written by Barbara Penney.



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Contents

About This Document	iii	Progress on Our Calls for Change	17
Citation	iii	<i>Action Area 1: Education, Training, and Employment</i>	17
Copyright	iii	Focus Area A: Curriculum Development and Deployment	17
Acknowledgements	iii	Focus Area B: Professional Training and Development	24
Land Acknowledgement	1	Focus Area C: Employment Equity	28
Executive Summary	3	<i>Action Area 2: Housing and Homelessness</i>	31
Background	6	Focus Area A: Service and Program Development	31
Origins of Our Shared Vision	6	Focus Area B: Poverty Reduction	40
Developing the 2026 Reconciliation Report	8	<i>Action Area 3: Infrastructure and Service Delivery</i>	44
The State of Reconciliation in St. John's, 2026	9	Focus Area A: Expanding Cultural Spaces	44
Celebrating Progress	9	Focus Area B: Systemic Discrimination	55
Indigenous-led Transitional Housing	9	<i>Action Area 4: Justice and Human Rights</i>	64
Indigenous-led Urban Health Clinic	9	Focus Area A: Cultural and Security Supports	64
Growing Reconciliation Partnerships with Municipalities	9	Focus Area B: Law Reform	71
Progress in the Criminal Justice System	10	Reflection: The Urban Inuk	77
Facing Challenges	11	Task List	83
Gaps in Public Education	11	References	91
Housing Crisis	12	Index	97
Rising Cost of Living	12		
Priority Calls for Change 2026	13		
Illustrations and Artist's Message	14		



Land Acknowledgement

St. John's is home to a rich, diverse, and vibrant urban Indigenous community. Located on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Beothuk, the lands and waters in and around the City have traditionally served as a gathering place for the Mi'kmaq. The broader region of Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be home to diverse Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. We honour and pay respect to the past, present, and future caretakers of these territories.





Executive Summary

The 2026 Reconciliation Report provides an update on the state of truth and reconciliation in St. John's since the publication of our last Reconciliation Report in 2024, *Steps Taken, Miles to Go*. Each of the updates included in this report is based on the 42 Calls for Change outlined in First Light's Community Action Plan, called *Our Shared Vision: A Path toward Truth and Reconciliation in St. John's, NL, 2023–33*. These updates are provided in detail in the body of this report and are also available online through the First Light website.

Since the 2024 Reconciliation Report, the First Voice brand has retired in favour of a more culturally grounded approach to Indigenous-led advocacy. This new model includes:

- (1) The Advocacy Council, which guides First Light's advocacy work;
- (2) Gathering of Voices, a seasonal gathering where community members can share stories about their experiences and the changes they wish to see;
- (3) Action Circles, which govern research and knowledge mobilization initiatives; and the
- (4) *Restoring Good Relations Framework*, which outlines the relationship between First Light and those organizations and groups who join us in advocacy alongside the urban Indigenous people of St. John's.

We are pleased to celebrate major themes of progress in the following areas:

- The opening of Harvey House, a 10-unit transitional housing facility, dedicated to supporting Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals who have lived experience of violence.
- An initial grant from the Department of Health and Community Services to support the First Light Urban Indigenous Health Clinic, which will begin operations in fall 2026.
- Establishment of the Metro Reconciliation Partnership on the Northeast Avalon, including the St. John's Reconciliation Circle joining First Light and the City of St. John's, and a Regional Reconciliation Circle joining First Light, Mount Pearl, and Paradise. Future pathways for additional municipalities are available through a Learning Circle.
- Progress toward ensuring all incarcerated Indigenous individuals have access to cultural programming, with funding now in place for the West Coast Correctional Centre and the Bishop's Falls Correctional Centre, as well as ongoing negotiations for services at Her Majesty's Penitentiary and the Clarenville Correctional Centre.

While there is much to celebrate, there continue to be challenges to realizing the 42 Calls for Change. These include:

- Persistent gaps in public education and awareness of Indigenous cultures, histories and current realities that exacerbate inequities. Contributors to this report expressed frustration that many people in the general public do not understand that Indigenous Peoples have been and remain present throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, including in the St. John's area. These and other misunderstandings stem from the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from the Terms of Union with Canada in 1949 and a longstanding need to revise the K-12 curriculum.
- A deepening housing crisis in St. John's. The demand for emergency shelters has been rapidly increasing, with waitlists for supportive and transitional housing approaching 500 individuals. Horizons at 106, a transitional housing facility with 75 beds, is set to close after December 31, 2026.¹ With systemic economic challenges affecting the urban Indigenous community, many are facing challenges with housing insecurity.

- The rising cost of living, which presents further economic barriers that many urban Indigenous individuals face. The historic and ongoing pressures of colonialism, seizure and commodification of Land, and discriminatory laws have economically marginalized Indigenous Peoples. The intersection of these challenges are exacerbating issues with food and housing insecurity, as well as difficulties affording essential costs, such as heating and transportation.

Given the current landscape, we have chosen three priority Calls for Change where urgent action is needed to continue advancing truth and reconciliation as of September 2026.

¹ End Homelessness St. John's, "Statement from End Homelessness St. John's on the Future of Horizons," April 30, 2026, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ce447ded4c5c500016591a0/t/69f3a4cfb1ee5b4e0eed7f8f/1777575121258/EHS_J_Media_Release_20260430.pdf.



Priority Calls for Change 2026

1. Promote and support the redevelopment of the K-12 curriculum so that it includes appropriate content on Indigenous histories, cultures, stories, and languages as well as a discussion of colonialism and its legacy in the province. This process must be undertaken with the collaboration of all Indigenous groups in the province, including urban Indigenous people. (Call for Change 1.)
2. Build strategic partnerships to support the development and delivery of sector-specific antiracism training in essential areas such as health, law, education, engineering, and government services. (Call for Change 6.)
3. Collaborate with service providers, including those in the private rental market, to ensure that Indigenous people have equal access to secure and affordable housing that is free of discrimination. (Call for Change 14.)

We encourage everyone to advocate for these changes by using your own voices to promote these priority Calls for Change. Contact your government representatives. Work toward progress in your own circles of influence. There have been exciting successes in truth and reconciliation since September 2024. Still, significant work remains to be done in each of our four action areas. Every person who lives in or is connected to the Northeast Avalon has a role to play in promoting and implementing the Calls for Change.

Truth and reconciliation require sustained action. Everyone in our city and province must keep pushing for change.

Background

Origins of *Our Shared Vision*

First Light's Community Action Plan, called *Our Shared Vision*,² was developed in pursuit of a world where the inherent rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador are respectfully recognized and actively supported by all. Published in February 2023, *Our Shared Vision* was developed based on the following sources, prioritizing the voices and lived experiences of urban Indigenous people living in St. John's:

- First Light's own assessment of the community's needs, based on more than 40 years of experience working with and serving the urban Indigenous community;
- Direct input gathered at a Community Feast held on September 18, 2019;
- The results of facilitated discussions held during the Decolonize YYT virtual policy conference on November 5-6, 2020; and
- Nearly two years of sustained discussions which were carried out at four Standing Committees working in the areas of education, training, and employment; health and wellness; housing and homelessness; and infrastructure and service delivery.

In its 42 Calls for Change,³ *Our Shared Vision* is intentionally aligned with the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). These documents represent decades of work and the voices of Indigenous Peoples from across Canada and around the world. The consensus of the community was – and remains – that there is no need to reproduce the work that led to these documents; instead, we must breathe life into their Calls and principles.

First Voice brand retires. First Light Advocacy continues.

Developing and mobilizing the 42 Calls for Change was done through the First Voice, a coalition led by First Light that included our institutional partners and Indigenous community advocates. While First Voice and its Partnership Table was essential in laying the groundwork for change, it became clear over time that a more open, culturally grounded, and community-responsive model was needed, one that better reflected Indigenous relational values and would deepen both participation and accountability.

² First Voice Urban Indigenous Coalition, *Our Shared Vision: A Path toward Truth and Reconciliation in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2023–33*; an Urban Indigenous Community Action Plan (First Voice Urban Indigenous Coalition, 2023), ISBN 978-1-7387971-1-0, <https://firstvoicenl.ca/publications/our-shared-vision-a-path-toward-truth-and-reconciliation-in-st-johns-newfoundland-and-labrador-2023–33/>.

³ First Voice Urban Indigenous Coalition, "A Vision for the Future: Our Calls for Change," February 2023, ISBN 978-1-7387971-2-7.

The coalition reached a turning point in late 2024 when planning began to integrate First Voice more closely into First Light. By fall 2025, the First Voice brand was retired. This shift represented a natural evolution, carrying forward the work and spirit of First Voice while making space for new relationships and more inclusive forms of collaboration.

Key elements of the new model include:

- The *Restoring Good Relations Framework*, which describes a spectrum of engagement based on four clusters of threads: Relations, Allies, Change-Makers, and Partners;
- An Indigenous-led, culturally grounded Advocacy Council to offer strategic direction on shared priorities; and
- The Gathering of Voices, a series of seasonal, community-wide events for feasting, listening, storytelling, and collective reflection.⁴

The Action Circle model has also evolved. The renewed model returns to the original intention: Action Circles are time-limited groups convened to achieve one clear objective, rather than serving as standing committees on broad issues. They bring together those whose knowledge, experience, and relationships are most relevant to the work. Cultural grounding and ceremony help anchor each Action Circle in community and shared purpose, while preventing them from drifting into overly formal, boardroom-style committees.

First Light's advocacy now begins by creating intentional, culturally grounded spaces where urban Indigenous voices, experiences, and priorities guide the work. Decision-makers in government and outside organizations are then invited into these spaces to listen, learn, build relationships, and walk alongside community to advance change.



⁴ After each Gathering of Voices, a Message from the Gathering is published. The Message from the Gathering reports on the general themes of what was shared at the Gathering, giving a picture of what the urban Indigenous community is experiencing and what changes they were advocating for at the Gathering.

Developing the 2026 Reconciliation Report

First Light continues to prioritize the voices and lived experiences of urban Indigenous people living in St. John's. Developing our 2026 Reconciliation Report involved extensive consultation, including with the following groups:

- First Light staff who manage and deliver frontline programs and services for Indigenous people in St. John's;
- Advocacy Council, a group which includes Elders, First Light staff members, and members of the urban Indigenous community called Community Stewards;
- Attendees at three Gatherings of Voices from Winter 2025 to Summer 2026;
- Indigenous community members who are involved with First Light's Peer Support Group and Transitional Housing at Harvey House;
- Feedback gathered during Action Circle meetings; and
- Publicly available information on organizations working in areas related to one or more of the 42 Calls for Change.

First Light continues to be steadfast in our commitment to walk the path of truth and reconciliation with any and all willing partners. We will continue to build and strengthen relationships with those who share our vision of a world where the inherent rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador are respectfully recognized and actively supported by all.



The State of Reconciliation in St. John's, 2026

Celebrating Progress

First Light is proud to celebrate key successes in the past 2 years, including the opening of Harvey House, establishing funding for an urban Indigenous-led health clinic in St. John's, expanding partnerships with municipalities, and research on the representation of Indigenous Peoples in correctional facilities.

Urban Indigenous-led Transitional Housing

In July 2025, First Light opened Harvey House, a 10-unit transitional housing facility, dedicated to supporting Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals who have lived experience of violence. This safe and inclusive space is staffed 24/7 by Inclusion Case Managers who provide support with developing skills in daily living, wellness goals, and culturally inclusive programming. Harvey House is named in loving memory of Andrew Harvey, who brought light and life to his community-building work in supporting housing and social well-being for the urban Indigenous community.

Funding Established for Urban Indigenous-led Health Clinic in St. John's

In April 2026, the Department of Health and Community Services committed to supporting the First Light Urban Indigenous Health Clinic, which will begin operations in fall 2026. This commitment involves arrangements for medical care staff through existing contract models, and a one-time grant for the 2026–27 fiscal year for non-medical staff, in addition to the commitment to include the funding package for the clinic in the 2027–28 budget.

Growing Reconciliation Partnerships with Municipalities

The City of St. John's and First Light have been working together to advance truth and reconciliation in St. John's since the formation of First Voice. In January 2024, this work expanded through the Joint Coordinating Committee on Indigenous Rights. With growing interest from other municipalities in the region, we have further expanded this work by establishing the Metro Reconciliation Partnership as an umbrella structure for municipal reconciliation efforts across the Northeast Avalon. This partnership includes the St. John's Reconciliation Circle, the Regional Reconciliation Circle (Mount Pearl and Paradise), and future pathways for additional municipalities through a Learning Circle. This structure ensures alignment across municipalities while allowing each circle to reflect its own context, relationships, and priorities.

On June 3, 2026, First Light held its inaugural gathering of the Metro Reconciliation Partnership. The new initiative brought together partners, changemakers, and allies from the City of St. John's, the City of Mount Pearl, the Town of Paradise, and the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's to coordinate reconciliation efforts at the municipal level throughout the metro region.

Progress in the Criminal Justice System

Since the 2024 Reconciliation Report, significant progress has been made in terms of access to cultural programming inside correctional facilities (Call for Change 35), availability of systems navigators (Call for Change 36), and access to Gladue reports (Call for Change 38). The status of each of these three calls is now Partly Achieved: a significant advancement from Roadblocks Encountered (Calls for Change 35 and 36) and Work Underway (Call for Change 38).

In November 2025, First Light conducted research on the demographics of adult correctional facilities in Newfoundland Labrador. The findings of this study were published in March 2026 in the report *Overrepresented and Undercounted: A Snapshot of Indigenous Adult Incarceration in Newfoundland and Labrador*.⁵ The research found that 43% of incarcerated individuals in the province were Indigenous, and among women inmates, the rate was even higher at 53%. This piece of research has become a significant advocacy tool to push for better access to cultural programming inside correctional facilities (Call for Change 35), systems navigators (Call for Change 36), access to Gladue reports (Call for Change 38), restorative justice and alternative sanctions programs (Call for Change 37), as well as the implementation of a no-discharge-into-homelessness policy (Call for Change 15).

In April 2026, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released the 2026 Provincial budget. It included a grant for the Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network (NAWN) to continue their Gladue Writer program,⁶ which began in fall of 2024. This grant is promising and First Light will continue to advocate for sustained funding for Gladue report writing to ensure Indigenous people in the province who are involved in the criminal justice system can access their legal right⁷ to have their Gladue factors considered in court.

On July 7 2026, First Light released two legal guides to help Indigenous individuals who have intersections with the criminal justice system to access their rights to cultural programming and to have their Gladue factors considered in court. The more comprehensive guide, *Claiming Our Rights*,⁸ is intended for Indigenous governments and organizations seeking to advance Indigenous rights within the provincial corrections system. Its companion booklet, *Know Your Rights*,⁹ is written for current and former Indigenous inmates to help them understand their legal rights and provide more fully informed instructions to their legal representatives.

⁵ First Light, "Overrepresented and Undercounted: A Snapshot of Indigenous Adult Incarceration in Newfoundland and Labrador, 2025," March 30, 2026, <https://firstlightnl.ca/publication/overrepresented-and-undercounted/>.

⁶ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Budget 2026: A Plan for Safer Communities," 2026, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/budget/2026/what-you-need-to-know/a-plan-for-safer-communities/>.

⁷ First Light, *Claiming Our Rights: A Legal Guide for Indigenous Peoples Navigating Corrections in Newfoundland & Labrador* (St. John's, NL, 2026), <https://firstlightnl.ca/publication/claiming-our-rights/>.

⁸ First Light, *Claiming Our Rights: A Legal Guide for Indigenous Peoples Navigating Corrections in Newfoundland & Labrador*.

⁹ First Light, *Know Your Rights: A Guide for Indigenous Inmates in Newfoundland & Labrador* (St. John's, NL, 2026), <https://firstlightnl.ca/publication/know-your-rights/>.

On July 30 2026, the Department of Justice and Public Safety announced a \$270,000 grant to support cultural programming at the West Coast Correctional Centre in Stephenville, the Bishop's Falls Correctional Centre, and the Labrador Correctional Centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.¹⁰ At the time of writing this Reconciliation Report, negotiations with the Department of Justice and Public Safety are ongoing to ensure sustainable funding for Indigenous inmates to access cultural programming at Her Majesty's Penitentiary and the Clarenville Correctional Centre.

Regarding Call for Change 36, The Law Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador has provided a grant to support an Indigenous Justice Navigator. The role has provided one-on-one support to community members at various stages of their involvement with the criminal justice system, including court accompaniment, education for community members about legal processes and their rights.

The research and advocacy initiatives of the past two years have significantly advanced our Calls for Change concerning the justice system. Advocacy for Indigenous individuals who have intersections with the criminal justice system continues.

Facing Challenges

Over the past two years, three main challenges permeate the work in each of the Action Areas in our 42 Calls for Change. Progress toward truth and reconciliation in St. John's and surrounding areas has been delayed or stalled because of persistent gaps in public education, inequities accentuated by the rising cost of living, and a crisis in access to market and non-market housing.

Gaps in Public Education

Decision-makers and service providers regularly misunderstand basic concepts about Indigenous Peoples in NL. Community members and staff have expressed frustration that many people in the general public do not understand that Indigenous Peoples have always been and remain present in Newfoundland and Labrador, including in the St. John's area. This and other misunderstandings continue to be perpetuated by an outdated the K-12 curriculum, and from the lasting effects of Indigenous Peoples' exclusion from the Terms of Union with Canada in 1949. When those in positions of power, such as politicians and healthcare workers, are not taught about Indigenous Peoples in school, there is less motivation for them to prioritize truth and reconciliation in this province. The lack of public understanding was also a major challenge identified in the 2024 Reconciliation Report.

¹⁰ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Indigenous Cultural Programming at Correctional Facilities Enhanced - News Releases," Department of Justice and Public Safety, July 30, 2026, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2026/jps/0730n02/>.

St. John's Currently in a Housing Crisis

Since the 2024 Reconciliation Report, the rate of homelessness has continued to climb, exacerbating issues for the urban Indigenous community who face housing inequities. The demand for emergency shelters has increased by 5 times between 2020 and 2025. Waitlists for supportive and transitional housing options are approaching 500 individuals.¹¹ First Light staff continue to observe that the need for emergency shelter is far higher than the number of available beds and that Indigenous community members face intense threats to their own safety when attempting to access emergency shelters. Horizons at 106, a transitional housing facility with 75 beds, is set to close after December 31, 2026. The provincial government has defended this decision on the basis of fiscal responsibility, but it has yet to introduce a plan for those currently living at Horizons.¹²

Rising Cost of Living Accentuates Inequities

It is widely acknowledged that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are facing a rising cost of living.¹³ The 2026 Poverty Report Card indicated that 39% of people across the province are paying over 30% of their income toward housing costs. This adds pressure to the overall cost of living: on average, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians spent 62% of their income on essential costs. This high percentage places the province among the worst nationally.¹⁴ The historic and ongoing pressures of colonialism, seizure and commodification of Land, and discriminatory laws have created a societal environment in which Indigenous Peoples are economically marginalized.¹⁵ Indigenous community members who contributed to the 2026 Reconciliation Report discussed the struggles of the rising cost of living, which include difficulties in finding and maintaining safe housing, the lack of access to affordable food, and difficulties covering basic costs such as home heating and transportation.



¹¹ End Homelessness St. John's, "Statement from End Homelessness St. John's on the Future of Horizons."

¹² NL Housing Corporation, "Minister Wall Responds to Auditor General's Report on Horizons at 106," May 27, 2026, <https://www.nlhc.nl.ca/2026/05/minister-wall-responds-to-auditor-generals-report-on-horizons-at-106/>.

¹³ Shauna Bernard, "'It Starts to Get Exhausting': The Real Cost of Living in St. John's | PNI Atlantic News," The Telegram, accessed August 4, 2026, <https://www.saltwire.com/newfoundland-labrador/the-real-cost-of-living-in-st-johns>; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Craig Parry, "Budget Speech - Budget 2026," April 29, 2026, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/budget/2026/budget-speech/>.

¹⁴ Food Banks Canada, "Newfoundland and Labrador Poverty Report Card," 2026, https://foodbankscanada.ca/poverty-report-cards/report-card/?prc_province=nl.

¹⁵ Sangaralingam Ramesh, "Economic Marginalization and Structural Inequalities," in *The Political Economy of the Indigenous Peoples of the World, Volume II*, by Sangaralingam Ramesh (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-24129-0_2.

Priority Calls for Change 2026

1. Promote and support the redevelopment of the K-12 curriculum so that it includes appropriate content on Indigenous histories, cultures, stories, and languages as well as a discussion of colonialism and its legacy in the province. This process must be undertaken with the collaboration of all Indigenous groups in the province, including urban Indigenous people. (Call for Change 1.)
2. Build strategic partnerships to support the development and delivery of sector-specific anti-racism training in essential areas such as health, law, education, engineering, and government services. (Call for Change 6.)
3. Collaborate with service providers, including those in the private rental market, to ensure that Indigenous people have equal access to secure and affordable housing that is free of discrimination. (Call for Change 14.)





designs by Juliette Onalik

Illustrations

We invited community member and Inuk artist Juliette Onalik, who currently lives in St. John's, to create artwork for our 2026 Reconciliation Report. Juliette is revisiting and exploring lithographic artwork for the first time since her days as a high school student. By using carvings and ink, and re-imagining her creations through different types of media, Juliette creates unique textures that allow her to bring her artistic visions to life.

I think of it as being rooted in Indigeneity.

How it is so deep in our blood to be Inuk/Indigenous that it shows within everyday life, through our looks, the way we naturally crave the earth, our love for community and our people, through our natural way of being connected through food and culture, to want to learn, to want to keep our culture alive, through this art piece I made.

It's about being a woman, an Inuk woman, to be so close with the next generation and shaping their future. The loss of our rights to caribou hunting. She is eating right from the caribou herself. It also shows the nutrition she is giving to her baby, as well as how rich it is for us and how important it is for us, through clothing, tools, food, nutrients, our ways of life.

We have our own collective of traditions rooted and created from just living. We have meaning, we keep it passed on through generations. It shows we are here, sharing in these days we have now, through story telling, sharing, from family and friends, to ones that are learning.





Progress on our Calls for Change

Below we offer updates on each of the Calls for Change from Our Shared Vision. For a list of relevant tasks for the upcoming year, organized by each relevant decision-making group, see pages 83–89.

Action Area 1: Education, Training, and Employment

We envision a city where all residents have a sound understanding of the diverse histories and cultures of the Indigenous Peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador and where they mobilize such understanding to close gaps in education and employment outcomes. To realize this vision, we call on all residents of the Northeast Avalon to help advance change in the following ways:

Focus Area A: Curriculum Development and Deployment

CALL FOR CHANGE 1

Promote and support the redevelopment of the K-12 curriculum so that it includes appropriate content on Indigenous histories, cultures, stories, and languages as well as a discussion of colonialism and its legacy in the province. This process must be undertaken with the collaboration of all Indigenous groups in the province, including urban Indigenous people

STATUS : Roadblocks Encountered



Minimal progress noted with Department of Education and NL Schools

The Department of Education had had an Indigenous Education Advisory Committee (IEAC) since 2015, yet little has changed with the K-12 curriculum. First Light requested to join the IEAC on multiple occasions, and this has consistently been denied. In 2026, the Department reported to First Light that the committee itself was disbanding in favour of individual partnerships between the Department and Indigenous organizations. First Light's request to become a partner in this structure was declined.

In the 2025–2026 academic year, NL Studies 2205 was added to the high school curriculum. This course includes some accurate information on Indigenous cultures and histories in Newfoundland and Labrador. However, since the textbook was completed in 2010, some information has become outdated. For instance, members of the NunatuKavut Community Council are referred to as “Metis” and the 2011–2018 introduction of a “point system” for granting status under the Indian Act with Qalipu First Nation were not

described.¹⁶ While this course represents a step toward achieving this Call for Change, much more must be done. The Indigenous Local Course Policy allows Indigenous communities to develop and implement their own materials, yet this places the responsibility for course development on Indigenous communities while leaving schools outside of those communities without accurate information on Indigenous cultures, histories, and current realities. Indigenous children who live outside reserve and land claims areas deserve to see their cultures represented in school. This includes children in urban areas such as St. John's.

Lack of public knowledge root cause of discrimination

Misinformation about Indigenous Peoples in this province has been regularly identified as a source of discrimination faced by urban Indigenous people in St. John's.¹⁷ It is essential that all children receive accurate information about Indigenous histories, cultures, and current realities. Doing so will inform the general public about Indigenous Peoples of this province and reduce the discrimination that Indigenous individuals face.

Province of Newfoundland and Labrador uses a "300-year" timeline of Innu Nation

On June 17, 2026, Innu Nation announced that it had made the difficult decision to cancel the much anticipated exhibit Innu Pakassiun ("Innu Tools for Survival"), which had been scheduled to open on National Indigenous Peoples Day at the Labrador Interpretation Centre,¹⁸ a location of The Rooms in Northwest River.¹⁹ "The decision had followed direction conveyed to Innu Nation by The Rooms that the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador requires that the exhibit not claim more than 300 years of Innu habitation in Labrador," said Innu Nation in a statement. "This version of Innu history is inconsistent with both the accepted archaeological consensus regarding Innu history of Labrador and Innu Nation's own understanding of its history."²⁰ When questioned on the restrictions placed on the

¹⁶ From 2011–2018 there was a re-evaluation of thousands of applications for status under the Indian Act through Qalipu First Nation. The initial estimates of the size of Qalipu First Nation were significantly smaller than the 104,000 applications that were submitted when Qalipu was first federally recognized. This re-evaluation revoked the status of over 10,000 original members of the band, given criteria such as where the applicants lived, frequency of visits to their home community, and proof of self-identification as Indigenous prior to 2008. In many cases, even siblings from the same household differed in whether their status was given or maintained. While news stories widely acknowledged the upsetting nature of this situation, the present data suggest that loss of federal recognition through status also caused some individuals to lose their sense of identity as Indigenous. See for example <https://qalipu.ca/announcement-qalipu-updated-membership/> and <https://gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2021/2021-05-12/html/sor-dors90-eng.html>

¹⁷ First Light, "Gathering of Voices: Message from the Gathering (Spring 2026)," First Light, May 4, 2026, <https://firstlightnl.ca/article/message-from-the-gathering-spring-2026-feast/>; First Light, "Gathering of Voices: Message from the Gathering (Winter 2025)," First Light, November 18, 2025, <https://firstlightnl.ca/site/uploads/2025/11/Message-from-the-Gathering-Winter-2025-3.pdf>; First Light, Reconciliation Report 2024: Steps Taken, Miles to Go (First Light, 2024), 104, <https://firstvoicenl.ca/publications/steps-taken-miles-to-go-reconciliation-report-2024/>.

¹⁸ VOCM, "Exhibit for National Indigenous Peoples Day Cancelled Due to 'Inconsistencies' with Innu History," June 18, 2026, <https://vocm.com/2026/06/18/exhibit-for-national-indigenous-peoples-day/>.

¹⁹ The Rooms, "Labrador Interpretation Centre, North West River," accessed August 12, 2026, <https://therooms.ca/our-locations/labrador-interpretation-centre-north-west-river>.

²⁰ Innu Nation, "Innu Nation Cancels Cultural Exhibit Over Provincial Interference in Innu History," Facebook, June 17, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1346859390872101&set=a.276215101269874&type=3&ref=embed_post.

exhibit, The Rooms deferred all questions to the provincial government who have yet to provide their reasoning on the matter.²¹

The Provincial Archaeology Office has been acting on the “300-year” stance for several years, including submitting such arguments in a 2023 court case over caribou hunting.²² Multiple academic researchers continue to argue that this stance is unfounded.²³ A group of eight anthropologists and archaeologists at Memorial University published an open letter on the matter, saying, “The archaeological literature on Labrador does not support the categorical exclusion of long-term Innu presence.”²⁴ Multiple Indigenous groups, including the Assembly of First Nations, have also shared statements of support for Innu Nation and denounced the Provincial Government’s position on Innu history.

This is an example of how a gap in the K-12 curriculum on Indigenous histories, cultures, and current realities can lead to problems in the larger society. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is acting on an interpretation of archeological evidence which is endorsed by only a very small number of researchers. This “fringe theory”²⁵ fails to account for Indigenous oral histories that challenge its conclusions. Reforming the K-12 curriculum would support better understanding in the general public, including among politicians and public servants. Call for Change 1 is not only an educational reform, but a necessary step to support and affirm the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the policymaking process.

NEXT STEPS

- Expand representation on the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee to include all Indigenous groups in the province, including urban Indigenous Peoples.
- Conduct a full review of the K–12 curriculum to identify the most severe areas of Indigenous misrepresentation and prioritize areas requiring urgent change.
- Ensure full public transparency throughout the curriculum redevelopment process.
- Develop and publish a clear plan with timelines for completing curriculum redevelopment.
- Allocate funding in the upcoming budget cycle to support interim measures, including teacher training and the distribution of Indigenous-developed educational materials.

²¹ CBC News, “N.L. Indigenous Relations Minister Acknowledges ‘distrust,’ but Does Not Address Innu History Timeline,” June 19, 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/nl-government-innu-exhibit-9.7241833>.

²² The Independent, “Province Shocks Innu, Disputes Their History in Labrador,” June 19, 2026, <https://theindependent.ca/news/province-shocks-innu-disputes-their-history-in-labrador/>.

²³ Maddie Ryan, “Research on Innu History in Labrador ‘demolishes’ Government’s 300-Year Argument, Says MUN Archaeologist,” CBC News, June 27, 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/innu-history-dispute-archaeologist-9.7251386>.

²⁴ Ashley Fitzpatrick, “Trust Undermined, Innu Harmed by N.L. Government Response to Exhibit Dispute: MUN Profs,” CBC News, June 25, 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/mun-professors-innu-dispute-exhibit-9.7249023>.

²⁵ APTN News, “Innu Nation Cancels Exhibition, Claims N.L. Government Pushed to Rewrite History,” June 18, 2026, <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/innu-nation-cancels-exhibition-claims-n-l-government-pushed-them-to-rewrite-history/>.

CALL FOR CHANGE 2

Promote and support the addition of appropriate Indigenous content in early childhood education, including cultural practices, stories, languages, and land-based activities.

STATUS : **Work Underway**



First Light and Martin Family Initiative (MFI) develop training for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs)

First Light and MFI have collaboratively developed a 40-hour training program delivered over one week for ECEs to share cultural knowledge. The toolbox card resources to be used in the ECE classroom are available in three Indigenous languages: Mi'kmaw, Innu-aimun, and Inuttitut. The toolbox cards include topics such as land-based learning, cultural teachings, and language learning. These cards may be given to the child's family to continue their learning at home.

AECENL builds ECE knowledge with First Light's Roots of Knowledge course

The Association for Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL) have continued their work to improve knowledge among ECEs of Indigenous cultures. In collaboration with First Light, over 100 ECEs have completed the Roots of Knowledge certificate course. The course itself has evolved with collaborative efforts for continuous improvement. While this number falls short of the original 600, it still marks progress on this Call for Change.

NEXT STEPS

For MFI:

- Review, augment, and improve toolbox training materials.

For AECENL:

- Continue rollout of Roots of Knowledge course to meet target 600 ECEs.
- Plan for continuous improvement and/or expansion of the Roots of Knowledge course.



CALL FOR CHANGE 3

Collaborate with post-secondary institutions to ensure that programs in essential areas such as health, law, education, engineering, and public policy incorporate mandatory content on antiracism and the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.

STATUS : Work Underway



CNA develops and makes mandatory Indigenous-specific content in two more programs

College of the North Atlantic (CNA) now includes Indigenous Cultural Diversity training as an integral component of the Tourism & Hospitality Management diploma. Critical Indigenous Studies was added as a mandatory component of the Comprehensive Arts & Science Transfer: College-University. These changes are in addition to CNA's pre-existing courses on Indigenous cultures, histories, and current realities.¹⁶ This means mandatory content on Indigenous Peoples is now part of seven CNA programs:

- Bachelor of Applied Arts: Early Childhood Education
- College Bridging Certificate
- College Transition Certificate
- Comprehensive Arts & Science Transfer: College-University Certificate
- Journalism Diploma
- Mental Health and Addictions Diploma
- Tourism & Hospitality Management Diploma

Memorial University's Office of Indigenous Affairs maintains inclusion specialist

Memorial University has an Indigenous Education specialist to promote the inclusion of Indigenous histories and cultures of Newfoundland and Labrador. First Light is supporting this work.

NEXT STEPS

For post-secondary institutions:

- Begin working toward collaborative relationships to co-develop content on antiracism and the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.

²⁶ College of the North Atlantic, "College Bridging: Courses," accessed August 6, 2026, <https://www.cna.nl.ca/programs-courses/Show-Program-Details.aspx?program=232#tab3>; College of the North Atlantic, "Comprehensive Arts & Science (CAS) Transfer: Courses," accessed August 6, 2026, <https://www.cna.nl.ca/programs-courses/Show-Program-Details.aspx?program=1#tab3>; College of the North Atlantic, "Journalism Diploma: Courses," accessed August 6, 2026, <https://www.cna.nl.ca/programs-courses/Show-Program-Details.aspx?program=237#>; College of the North Atlantic, "Mental Health and Addictions Diploma: Courses," accessed August 6, 2026, <https://www.cna.nl.ca/programs-courses/Show-Program-Details.aspx?program=222#tab3>; College of the North Atlantic, "Bachelor of Applied Arts: Early Childhood Education: Courses," Early Childhood Education, accessed August 6, 2026, <https://www.cna.nl.ca/programs-courses/Show-Program-Details.aspx?program=217#tab3>; First Light, Reconciliation Report 2024.

CALL FOR CHANGE 4

Promote and support the development of post-secondary courses and degree programs in Indigenous languages.

STATUS : Early Steps Taken



Memorial University Department of Linguistics working toward reactivating Indigenous language courses

Memorial University's Department of Linguistics has offered courses in Inuttitut using a co-teaching structure where a faculty member supports an Inuit Elder in sharing their language knowledge. This is a course-delivery model that could be expanded to Mi'kmaw and Innu-aimun. However, recruitment and retention have been a challenge. Most fluent speakers of Innu-aimun and Mi'kmaw do not live in St. John's and budgetary challenges limit Memorial University's ability to attract knowledge carriers to the area.

While members of the urban Indigenous community of St. John's agree that university courses alone will not revitalize Indigenous languages,²⁷ courses such as these are one tool for sparking interest and growing knowledge in young Indigenous people, as well as building familiarity among non-Indigenous individuals.

First Light's Culture Camp 2026 sparks interest in Indigenous Language Revitalization

In March 2026, First Light held Culture Camp with a specific focus on Indigenous Languages. Culture Camp brought people together to spend time with culture through language and shared learning, creating space for connection, reflection, and relationship-building. Gathering of Voices was the first event in this year's Culture Camp and storytellers and attendees sparked interest in Indigenous Language Revitalization between community members and in representatives from supportive outside organizations who attended.²⁸ Conversations and events like these are foundational in building some momentum to support Indigenous languages and associated services in St. John's.

We're Indigenous and Still Here (WISH) summer student focuses on Indigenous languages

For the summer term of 2026, First Light retained a summer student through the SSHRC-funded project, We're Indigenous and Still Here (WISH). This summer student curated a library of language resources for First Light, contributed to research on language revitalization, and created multilingual signage for First Light's headquarters and the Lunar Inn.

²⁷ First Light, "Gathering of Voices: Message from the Gathering (Spring 2026)."

²⁸ First Light, "Gathering of Voices: Message from the Gathering (Spring 2026)."

NEXT STEPS

For Memorial University:

- Work toward the establishment of language proficiency courses in Innu-aimun and Mi'kmaw, dedicating sufficient resources to support language carriers.
- Continue to build support for language carriers to guide students in learning Inuttitut.

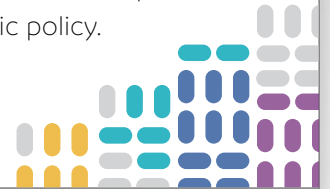


Focus Area B: Professional Training and Development

CALL FOR CHANGE 5

Promote and support the establishment of designated Indigenous seats in essential post-secondary programs such as health, law, education, engineering, and public policy.

STATUS : **Work Underway**



No progress has been identified on this Call for Change since the 2024 Reconciliation Report. Memorial University School of Medicine continues to have three designated seats for Indigenous medical students.



CALL FOR CHANGE 6

Build strategic partnerships to support the development and delivery of sector-specific antiracism training in essential areas such as health, law, education, engineering, and government services.

STATUS : Early Steps Taken



First Light launching Experiential Learning Program

After 10 years of delivering Cultural Diversity Training to over 10,000 participants, First Light identified a need to develop new programming that delves deeper into the rich cultures, histories, and current realities of Indigenous Peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador. The result is Threads of Knowledge. This 40-hour experiential learning program is designed to host participants at the Learning Lodge in the Lunar Inn. The program's relational approach is carefully designed to promote allyship, partnership, and change-making.

Organizations in key areas have consistently accessed First Light's Cultural Diversity Training

End Sexual Violence NL, Newfoundland Power, and End Homelessness St. John's have consistently booked First Light's Cultural Diversity Training for their staff. Thrive, YWCA, and Easter Seals have also all made significant efforts to train those working for or volunteering with their organizations. The City of St. John's offers First Light's Cultural Diversity Training to employees annually. There have also been First Light Cultural Diversity training sessions at Memorial University's School of Social Work, School of Pharmacy, Faculty of Nursing, Faculty of Medicine, School of Medicine, Sexual and Gender Advocacy Resource Centre, and Career Development Office.

Indigenous community members advocate for Indigenous-specific antiracism training in key service areas

Indigenous community members who contributed to this year's Reconciliation Report are calling for those working in key service delivery areas to receive Indigenous-specific antiracism training. The main areas in need of training at this time include social workers, individuals who do assessments of children or families (e.g., those evaluating a need for inclusion workers in daycares, public health nurses); foster families, especially where an Indigenous child will be placed with a non-Indigenous family; and healthcare workers, particularly those working in emergency departments. Indigenous people frequently face discrimination in these contexts, and appropriate training is essential for building momentum for systemic change.

NEXT STEPS

For professional associations:

- Prioritize building foundational knowledge among professionals working in essential areas by providing adequate training on the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador.

For employers:

- Ensure that senior and leadership roles complete comprehensive antiracism training that includes Indigenous-specific content.
- Implement policies mandating that all new hires complete foundational training on Indigenous histories, cultures, and sector-specific content as part of the onboarding process.



CALL FOR CHANGE 7

Collaborate with professional licensing bodies in essential areas such as health, law, education, and engineering to establish appropriate requirements that encompass antiracism and the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.

STATUS : Work Underway

 Progress since 2024



Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador helping to build knowledge among NL Lawyers

In 2024–2025, Benchers participated in Indigenous Cultural Diversity Training facilitated by First Light. Bar Admission Course students are also required to complete a national Indigenous cultural awareness program called The Path.²⁹ The Law Society's Indigenous Education and Action Committee has developed a required reading package for Bar Admission Course students focused on the legal history and lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador, including materials addressing Indigenous recognition, residential schools, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and the experiences of Innu children and families within the child protection system. The 2026 Bar Admission Course will also include a dedicated Indigenous cultural competency session featuring presentations from leaders, Elders, and staff representing Indigenous groups throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Law Society has also conducted outreach to Indigenous communities, including those in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador City-Wabush, the South Coast and the Straits, as part of its ongoing efforts to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and improve access to justice.

Ongoing work in primary healthcare and ECE

AECENL is building Indigenous knowledge among ECEs through the Roots of Knowledge program (see Call for Change 2). As noted in the 2024 Reconciliation Report, the course “Providing Culturally Safe Health Care for Indigenous Patients in Newfoundland and Labrador” continues to be a mandatory requirement for receiving and renewing a medical licence with the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

NEXT STEPS

For First Light:

- Continue making connections with licensing bodies in essential areas, focusing first on those where Action Circles are established (i.e. justice and health).

²⁹ Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, Annual Report 2024–2025, Annual Report (Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2025), <https://lsnl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Annual-Report-2024-2025-2.pdf>.

Focus Area C: Employment Equity

CALL FOR CHANGE 8

Promote and support the development, implementation, and enforcement of inclusive human-resources policies.

STATUS : Early Steps Taken



While there continues to be interest in inclusive human-resources policies, little progress has been identified since the 2024 Reconciliation Report.

NEXT STEPS

For First Light:

- Undertake research regarding inclusive human-resources policies and decolonizing workplace processes so as to support business-related Calls for Change (9-10)

For employers:

- Foster more inclusive workplaces by undertaking comprehensive training for leadership roles and foundational training for all employees on cultural humility and the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.



CALL FOR CHANGE 9

Create and support a network of businesses and business stakeholders to promote training and the sharing of wise practices in alignment with TRC 92.

STATUS : No Progress Identified



First Light Experiential Learning Program includes allyship content for businesses

The new Experiential Learning Program contains specific content on how businesses, non-profit organizations, and individuals can become allies or partners in the work of truth and reconciliation. This allyship module represents an important resource for businesses to begin the work of decolonizing their practices, which may support building a business network in alignment with TRC 92.

NEXT STEPS

For employers:

- Foster more inclusive workplaces by undertaking comprehensive training for leadership roles and foundational training for all employees on cultural humility and the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.



CALL FOR CHANGE 10

Support the recruitment and retention of Indigenous people into essential industries and professions such as medicine, law, education, engineering, and government services.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**



Barrier: Need for better cultural safety in workplaces

As noted in the 2024 Reconciliation Report, many employers have not undertaken foundational antiracism training for employees. With misinformation about Indigenous Peoples in NL being widespread in the province (see Call for Change 1), foundational training for employees is a particularly important step in supporting cultural safety for Indigenous people in workplaces. First Light will continue to work toward this Call for Change.

NEXT STEPS

For employers:

- Foster more inclusive workplaces by undertaking comprehensive training for leadership roles and foundational training for all employees on cultural humility and the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.



Action Area 2: Housing and Homelessness

We envision a city where all members of the urban Indigenous community enjoy access to safe, secure, and affordable housing. To realize this vision, we call on all residents of the Northeast Avalon to help advance change in the following ways:

Focus Area A: Service and Program Development

CALL FOR CHANGE 11

Lead, support, and coordinate research on the demographics of homelessness in St. John's and municipalities of the Northeast Avalon.

STATUS : **Work Underway**

 Progress since 2024



First Light conducts research on demographics of correctional facilities

In November 2025, First Light conducted research on the demographics of adult correctional facilities in Newfoundland Labrador. The findings of this study were published in the report *Overrepresented and Undercounted: A Snapshot of Indigenous Adult Incarceration in Newfoundland and Labrador*,³⁰ which received significant media and public attention. The research found that 43% of incarcerated individuals in the province were Indigenous, and among women inmates, the rate was even higher at 53%. If discharged that day, 34% of all respondents said they had nowhere safe to go, highlighting the need for coordinated discharge planning, and amplifying calls for implementation of a no-discharge-into-homelessness policy.

End Homelessness St. John's Point-in-Time (PiT) Count finds Indigenous overrepresentation

In November 2024, End Homelessness St. John's released *Everyone Counts: St. John's Homeless Point-in-Time Count 2024*,³¹ which recorded 313 people without stable housing on enumeration night (November 28, 2024). That marked a 71% increase from the 2022 count. The report estimates a minimum of 1,400 unique individuals who experienced homelessness over the course of 2024. Indigenous people made up 14% of respondents, despite representing only 3-4% of the total population in St. John's.

³⁰ First Light, "Overrepresented and Undercounted: A Snapshot of Indigenous Adult Incarceration in Newfoundland and Labrador, 2025," March 30, 2026, <https://firstlightnl.ca/publication/overrepresented-and-undercounted/>.

³¹ End Homelessness St. John's, *Everyone Counts: St. John's Homeless Point-in-Time Count November 2024*, Point-in-Time Count Report (End Homelessness St. John's, 2025), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ce447ded4c5c500016591a0/t/68929840621ce167262fd124/1754437705650/2024_StJohns_PiTCount.pdf.

NEXT STEPS

For End Homelessness St. John's:

- Continue to collaborate with Indigenous organizations like First Light to improve the accuracy of demographic data on homelessness and to ensure its ongoing availability to policymakers.



CALL FOR CHANGE 12

Ensure that demographic data drives program evaluation and delivery of services to the homeless population in St. John's and municipalities of the Northeast Avalon.

STATUS : Early Steps Taken

 Progress since 2024



End Homelessness St. John's makes data-driven recommendations

In November 2024, End Homelessness St. John's released its Community Plan to End Homelessness 2024-2028,³² which was developed from 97 interviews and 363 written submissions. The plan is informed by demographic data, and identifies 17 recommendations for all levels of government and sets explicit targets for reducing Indigenous homelessness. The demographic data which informs this plan includes Indigenous-specific data (see Call for Change 11 for more information). The methodology for the PiT count was developed in collaboration with First Light.

St. John's currently in a housing crisis

As noted in Call for Change 11, the rate of homelessness has continued to climb with the demand for emergency shelters having increased by 5 times between 2020 and 2025. "At the same time, NLHC [Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation] reports little to no vacancy across its social housing portfolio, with waitlists nearly doubling from 1,523 in 2021 to 2,970 in 2024," said End Homelessness St. John's in a public statement. "Supportive and transitional housing options are similarly constrained, with waitlists approaching 466 individuals."³³ First Light staff continue to observe that the need for emergency shelter is far greater than the number of available beds and that Indigenous community members face threats to their own safety when attempting to access emergency shelters.

Horizons at 106, a transitional housing facility with 75 beds, is set to close after December 31, 2026. This shelter was established following Tent City for Change, a combination of protest and encampment that began at the Confederation Building grounds and later moved to the Colonial Building grounds.³⁴ While the provincial government defends the decision to close Horizons on the basis of fiscal responsibility, there has been no clear plan announced to provide housing for those currently homeless.³⁵ Without a plan, those currently living at Horizons will lose their housing in January 2027.

³² End Homelessness St. John's, "St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness 2024-2028," November 2024, <https://wecanendit.com/communityplan>.

³³ End Homelessness St. John's, "Statement from End Homelessness St. John's on the Future of Horizons."

³⁴ CBC News, "One Year after Tent City Was Taken down, Issues Persist for Unhoused in St. John's," May 2, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/st-johns-tent-city-one-year-later-1.7523520>.

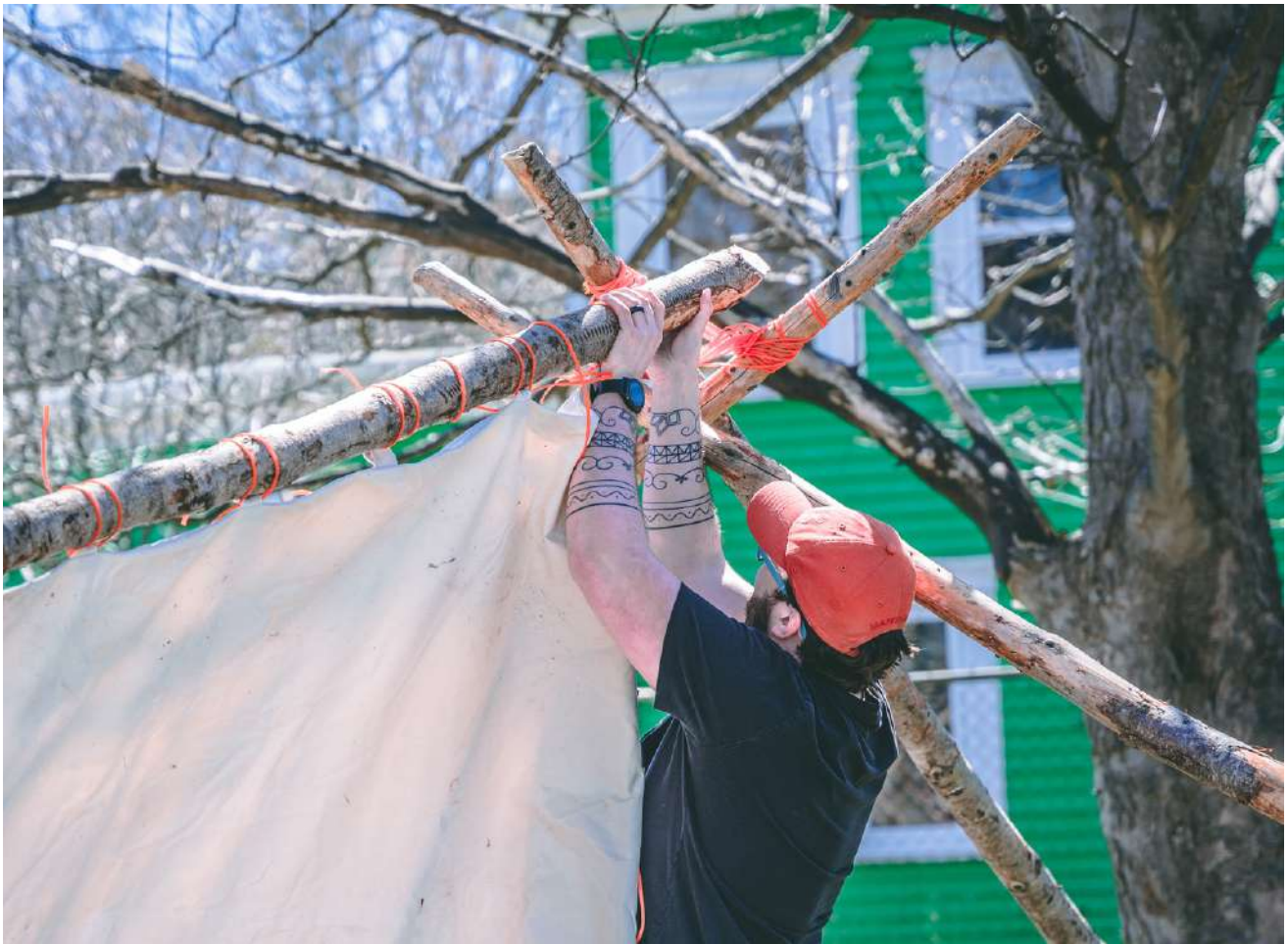
³⁵ NL Housing Corporation, "Minister Wall Responds to Auditor General's Report on Horizons at 106."

Even among those who have housing, poverty indicators suggest that the risk of homelessness in NL is high. 39% of people across the province are paying over 30% of their income on housing costs. This exacerbates the overall cost of living crisis – Newfoundlanders and Labradorians already spend 62% of their income on essential costs. This high percentage places the province among the worst nationally.³⁶ These indicators of poverty point to the precarity of housing in this province, suggesting that without action the rate of homelessness will only continue to rise.

NEXT STEPS

For First Light:

- Collaborate with service delivery agencies to ensure that Indigenous residents in nonmarket housing have access to culturally appropriate programming and spaces.



³⁶ Food Banks Canada, "Newfoundland and Labrador Poverty Report Card."

CALL FOR CHANGE 13

Collaborate with service delivery agencies to ensure that Indigenous residents in nonmarket housing have access to culturally appropriate programming and spaces.

STATUS : **Work Underway**

Progress since 2024



First Light opens Harvey House

In July 2025, First Light opened Harvey House, a 10-unit transitional housing facility, dedicated to supporting women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ relatives who have lived experience of violence. This safe and inclusive space is staffed 24/7 by Inclusion Case Managers who provide support with skills development for daily living, wellness goals, and culturally inclusive programming. Harvey House is named in loving memory of Andrew Harvey, a First Light colleague and champion of safe, inclusive, and affordable housing for urban Indigenous community members.

NEXT STEPS

For First Light:

- Continue to build relationships to support further response to the housing crisis in collaboration with government and service delivery organizations.



CALL FOR CHANGE 14

Collaborate with service providers, including those in the private rental market, to ensure that Indigenous people have equal access to secure and affordable housing that is free of discrimination.

STATUS : No Progress Identified



St. John's in a housing crisis

As described in Call for Change 12, St. John's is currently in a housing crisis. Individuals living in Newfoundland and Labrador are estimated to spend, on average, 62% of their income on essential expenses and 39% of those in the province spend more than 30% of their income on housing alone. In such circumstances, access to stable, affordable housing is critical. Many urban Indigenous community members report facing discrimination or conditions adverse to their physical health when it comes to their housing arrangements. Lack of affordable options is a key driver of unmet core housing needs.

Barrier identified: Insufficient rent control in NL

Compared to the rest of Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador has relatively little regulation on rent increases.³⁷ Although Newfoundland and Labrador's Residential Tenancies Act regulates the timing and notice of rent increases, it does not limit the amount by which landlords may increase rent.³⁸ Restricting the allowable rent increases can help protect tenants in the private housing market from arbitrary or discriminatory increases in their rent. Indigenous community members who contributed to this year's Reconciliation Report described experiencing racial discrimination both from private landlords and from service providers such as those processing applications for housing subsidies. Regulations such as rent control would provide one level of protection to ensure that Indigenous community members have equal access to affordable housing that is free of discrimination in the private rental market.

³⁷ Canadian Centre for Housing Rights, "Rent Regulation Policies across Canada," February 10, 2025, <https://housingrightscanada.com/resources/rent-control-policies-across-canada/>.

³⁸ The Telegram and Chris Ballard, "What Could Rent Control Look like in Newfoundland and Labrador?," April 27, 2026, [https://www.saltwire.com/newfoundland-labrador/rent-control-nl](https://www.saltwire.com/newfoundland-labrador/rent-control-nl;).; Residential Tenancies Act, cC-37.03 R-14.2 § 16 (2018), <https://www.assembly.nl.ca/legislation/sr/statutes/r14-2.htm>.

NEXT STEPS

For First Light:

- Build a relationship with the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to collaborate on measures addressing the housing crisis

For Government of Newfoundland and Labrador:

- Amend the Residential Tenancies Act to (a) limit the amount that rent can be increased per year and (b) provide better protections for tenants from no fault evictions.



CALL FOR CHANGE 15

Promote the implementation of a no-discharge-into-homelessness policy by the provincial government.

STATUS: **Early Steps Taken**

Progress since 2024



First Light research on Indigenous incarceration calls for better discharge planning

First Light's recent research *Overrepresented and Undercounted*³⁹ found that 34% of all participants would have nowhere safe to go if they were discharged that day. This was higher among Indigenous participants, at 39%. Those who stated that they had nowhere safe to go indicated that they may have to resort to survival crimes if no safe place could be secured. This highlights and reconfirms research showing that being homeless increases the risk of reoffending after discharge.⁴⁰ *Overrepresented and Undercounted* names discharge planning as one of the main evidence-based policy imperatives for the correctional system in Newfoundland and Labrador. See Call for Change 11 for more detail.

Barrier: Inadequate discharge planning continues

As was the case in the 2024 Reconciliation Report,⁴¹ First Light staff continue to see inadequate discharge planning at correctional facilities. This often manifests as incarcerated individuals being discharged without arrangements even for temporary housing, without appropriate clothing (e.g. being released without appropriate outerwear in the middle of winter), and without adequate coordination with external support programs like those at First Light. Additionally, inmates who apply for public assistance (e.g. income support) before their release cannot have their applications processed until they are no longer incarcerated, leaving weeks of wait time during which a former inmate may be homeless.

Location and time of day are often not considered in decision-making at the time of release. As a result, individuals may be released from custody when all shelters in the area are already full or in a location far from supports that would otherwise be available. Indigenous inmates are often (though not always) from areas of the province far from the correctional facility.

Similarly, First Light staff have noted inadequate discharge planning from healthcare facilities. First Light's Indigenous Patient Navigators (IPNs) support Indigenous patients in St. John's as they access healthcare, helping them navigate language barriers, find culturally safe support for their well-being, and stay connected to their culture throughout their care. Those travelling to St. John's from Labrador

³⁹ First Light, "Overrepresented and Undercounted: A Snapshot of Indigenous Adult Incarceration in Newfoundland and Labrador, 2025," March 30, 2026, <https://firstlightnl.ca/publication/overrepresented-and-undercounted/>.

⁴⁰ Stephen Gaetz and Bill O'Grady, *The Missing Link: Discharge Planning, Incarceration and Homelessness* (The John Howard Society of Ontario, 2006).

⁴¹ First Light, Reconciliation Report 2024.

for healthcare may be brought in an emergency air vehicle, such as Medevac, and sometimes with few of their possessions. Upon discharge, the patient may be booked to travel home on a passenger plane. A patient in these circumstances may require support throughout their journey home, such as systems navigation and translation services. While these individuals are not technically being discharged into homelessness, there is a risk that patients who are otherwise permanently housed may risk becoming stranded.

Barrier: Shelter system remains unsafe for many Indigenous people

Many Indigenous people face racism and threats to their physical safety, or know others who have, when seeking access the shelter system. As a result, some choose alternatives such as sleeping rough (e.g. in a park). Inadequate safety in shelters and the risks associated with sleeping alone outdoors can push some to return to abusive domestic situations. This risk is especially high for women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

NEXT STEPS

For NLHS:

- Address gaps faced at discharge by patients on the IPN caseload. This could be done by (a) implementing a policy to align discharge time for Indigenous patients on the IPN caseload with the IPN schedule, or (b) allocating funding for a 24-hour call schedule for St. John's-based IPNs.

For the Department of Justice and Public Safety (JPS):

- In collaboration with community service providers, implement a policy requiring that comprehensive discharge plans for all inmates be put in place before their release date. This policy must explicitly prohibit anyone from being discharged into homelessness.

For the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being (SSWB):

- Update policies on applying for income supports and other social programs to allow for processing of applications from individuals while they are incarcerated, with benefits to begin immediately upon release. Coordination with JPS staff involved in developing discharge plans will be required.

For providers of shelter space:

- Ensure all staff complete mandatory training on cultural humility, Indigenous cultures and histories, intergenerational trauma, anti-oppressive practice, and antiracism intervention.

Focus Area B: Poverty Reduction

CALL FOR CHANGE 16

Support provincial and national efforts to implement a guaranteed annual livable income.

STATUS : Work Underway



All-Party Committee on Basic Income recommends Basic Income Pilot in NL

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's All-Party Committee on Basic Income completed its final report in September 2025, which was tabled in April 2026. This recommends the province work with the federal government to implement a Basic Income pilot in NL. Implementing such a pilot would be a significant step forward for this Call for Change.

NL Anti-Poverty Coalition formed

More than 40 organizations, including First Light, have come together to form the new NL Anti-Poverty Coalition.⁴² To date, the coalition has recommended implementing the Basic Income Pilot proposed by the All-Party Committee (noted above), raising income supports above the poverty line, indexing benefits such as Income Support to inflation, increasing the income thresholds for the NL Child Benefit and child nutrition programs, and raising the minimum wage to a living wage. Although the provincial government has announced plans to develop a 10-year poverty reduction strategy, it has not yet released further details or a timeline.

Increase in disability benefits to alleviate symptoms of poverty for some

Disability benefits at both the federal and provincial levels have increased in the past year by \$200 and \$400 per month respectively. Those living with disabilities and low incomes who qualify for the disability tax credit will now receive more income support to alleviate the rising cost of living.⁴³ This is likely to have positive effects for individuals who already have access to the program. However, eligibility for the disability tax credit is complex and requires significant systems navigation work. For this reason, there will be many eligible individuals living with disabilities who may struggle to obtain it.

⁴² "Newfoundland and Labrador Anti-Poverty Coalition," accessed August 10, 2026, <https://www.nlantipoverty.ca/>.

⁴³ Food Banks Canada, "Newfoundland and Labrador Poverty Report Card."

CALL FOR CHANGE 17

Support efforts to ensure that Indigenous people and members of other racialized and marginalized communities have access to safe, affordable, and reliable transportation throughout the city.

STATUS : Early Steps Taken



Barrier: Accessible public transportation not readily available

While there exists a public transportation service for those with additional access needs in St. John's, community members have noted barriers to accessing this service, including long wait times and difficulties in proving their disability in order to qualify. This is a priority for many of the Indigenous community members who contributed to this year's Reconciliation Report.

Barrier: Transportation a need among those recently released from incarceration

Many individuals released from incarceration have court-ordered conditions that may require physically appearing at several locations around St. John's. These may include healthcare appointments, required programming, court dates, and regular check-ins. Depending on one's housing arrangements, attending all of these appointments using public transportation can be extremely difficult. Community members have expressed the difficulties of attending all of the necessary appointments and meeting all of their conditions while depending on the public transportation system. Long transit times and multiple transfers can add to the overall difficulty of reintegration after being discharged. Increased public transportation access would help these individuals reintegrate safely with the community.

PAL Airlines offers reduced tickets for residents of communities in Northern Labrador

Through the Labrador Air Access Program (LAAP), the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador offers a 50% discount on flights from eligible communities along the North Coast of Labrador to regional centres. This is an important piece of more affordable transportation for Indigenous residents in these areas. Some Indigenous community members in St. John's have called for a similar program to support people who have relocated from rural or remote Indigenous communities. This support would be especially important for those whose relocation was not voluntary, including people removed from their home communities through the child welfare system and those required to relocate to access healthcare, such as dialysis, that is unavailable closer to home.

NEXT STEPS

For Metrobus Transit:

- Begin building relationships with First Light and the urban Indigenous community to help guide planning in service delivery in future years.

CALL FOR CHANGE 18

Promote and support efforts to improve access to safe, stable, nutritious, and affordable food sources for the urban Indigenous community. This includes wild game, country foods, and other culturally significant sources of nutrition.

STATUS : Work Underway

Progress since 2024



First Light food security initiatives growing

In 2025, First Light received its first moose licence and successfully harvested its first moose. The harvest was shared with community members, supporting food security, cultural practices, and the revitalization of traditional food sharing.

The City of St. John's has allocated garden spaces at the H.G.R. Mews Community Centre and Victoria Park Community Gardens for First Light to support community gardening initiatives. Committee members visited the Botanical Gardens to gather inspiration and learn from existing gardening practices. Gardening activities continue at First Light's Bannerman Street location, where residents are participating in hands-on gardening activities along with staff. A greenhouse will be constructed to extend the growing season and create additional opportunities for land-based learning.

Raised garden beds have also been established at the First Light Daycare Centre as part of land-based learning programming, where children are able to learn about plant lifecycles through growing herbs, caring for plants, and incorporating harvested herbs into cooking activities. Additionally, the Lunar Inn (First Light's experiential learning hub) is developing a raised medicine garden featuring traditional medicines such as sage, sweetgrass, tobacco and Labrador tea, along with a secondary vegetable garden. This space will support cultural teachings, land-based learning, and community connection.

Food First NL continuing advocacy

Food First NL has partnered with Indigenous governments and organizations in Labrador and Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to introduce country foods in some long-term care settings in Labrador. The program may expand to Western Newfoundland in the coming years.

Right to Food, a national organization which works locally with Food First NL, has implemented a new advocacy strategy that centres Indigenous food sovereignty alongside income interventions.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development rolling out pay-what-you-can school lunch program

In September 2024, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, acting through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, became the first province or territory to sign an agreement with the Government of Canada under the National School Food Program.⁴⁴ That same year, the department began rolling out pay-what-you-can lunches at schools across the province. This initiative reportedly included initiatives to support the lunch programs connected with the NunatuKavut Community Council and the Nunatsiavut Government.⁴⁵ The program aims to reach 40,000 students by the end of the 2025–2026 academic year. It is unclear at the time of writing whether that target has been attained.

NEXT STEPS

For First Light:

- Continue to build and expand food security initiatives for urban Indigenous community members



⁴⁴ Government of Canada, “National School Food Program – 2025 to 2027 Action Plan – Newfoundland and Labrador - Canada.ca,” 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/newfoundland-action-plan-2025.html>.

⁴⁵ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, “School Lunch Programming Reaching Thousands More Students - News Releases,” September 12, 2025, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2025/eecd/0912n13/>.

Action Area 3: Infrastructure and Service Delivery

We envision a city that reflects the histories and cultures of the Indigenous Peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador and one where members of the urban Indigenous community are able to access essential services free of discrimination. To realize this vision, we call on all residents of the Northeast Avalon to help advance change in the following ways:

Focus Area A: Expanding Cultural Spaces

CALL FOR CHANGE 19

Decolonize the City of St. John's municipal plan and all related processes, procedures, and policies, including the heritage bylaw, and support similar initiatives in other municipalities of the Northeast Avalon.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**



Call for Change 19 evolves in response to increasing commitments to reconciliation in Northeast Avalon

Call for Change 19 was initially phrased in terms of the City of St. John's only. In the past 2 years, there has been significant progress toward reconciliation in other municipalities of the Northeast Avalon. Notably, in September 2024, the City of Mount Pearl signed a declaration in support of truth and reconciliation.⁴⁶ The signing of this declaration was an important step in Mount Pearl's commitment to build respectful relationships with Indigenous communities and foster greater understanding of Indigenous rights.

The City of St. John's continues to consult with First Light during planning processes and incorporate Indigenous knowledge and feedback into Neighbourhood Plans. To date, First Light has been a key contributor in drafting the Downtown, Cowan Heights, University Area, Rennie's River, Central, and Mundy Pond Neighbourhood Plans.

⁴⁶ City of Mount Pearl, NL, "Media Advisory: City of Mount Pearl to Sign Declaration in Support of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," September 16, 2024, <https://www.mountpearl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/RELEASE-City-of-Mount-Pearl-to-Sign-Declaration-in-Support-of-the-Rights-of-Indigenous-Peoples-Sept-16-2024.pdf>.

In February 2026, the City of St. John's approved a Heritage Strategic Plan, which contains a goal to expand understandings of heritage beyond Eurocentric history. This goal includes further commitment to work toward reconciliation with Indigenous residents and history.⁴⁷

Metro Reconciliation Partnership builds momentum across the Northeast Avalon

On June 3, 2026, First Light held the inaugural gathering of the Metro Reconciliation Partnership, bringing together partners, changemakers, and allies from the City of St. John's, the City of Mount Pearl, the Town of Paradise, and the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's. The Partnership provides a regional structure through which First Light and participating municipalities can coordinate and sustain reconciliation efforts across the Northeast Avalon.⁴⁸

Early progress includes the creation of a permanent, municipally funded Indigenous Municipal Reconciliation Liaison, housed at First Light, to guide the City of St. John's reconciliation efforts. The City of St. John's, the City of Mount Pearl, and the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's have also formally recognized National Indigenous Peoples Day in place of the June Holiday. Additional progress includes funding support from the City of St. John's toward First Light's National Indigenous Peoples Day Community Celebration and a new mural in Mount Pearl increasing the public visibility of Indigenous Peoples.

First Light publishing toolkit to support Decolonization of Municipalities

The Decolonizing Municipal Governance Toolkit, developed by First Light with support from the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF), provides a practical framework to help municipalities move beyond symbolic reconciliation toward meaningful, systemic change. The toolkit is informed by knowledge shared by municipalities across Canada, including the City of Halifax, the City of Saskatoon, the City of St. John's, and the City of Winnipeg. Grounded in the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), it provides municipalities with a practical framework for advancing reconciliation and decolonizing municipal governance. The toolkit supports municipal governments in assessing their current practices, strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities, and embedding Indigenous rights and perspectives into policies, governance, and decision-making. Intended as a living resource rather than a final plan, it encourages continuous learning, reflection, and accountability as municipalities work toward more equitable and respectful governance. The Toolkit will be published in the fall of 2026.

⁴⁷ The commitment is articulated as follows: "Work toward reconciliation with Indigenous residents and history.

a. Support and promote the implementation of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).

b. Continue to work with First Light to implement First Voice's Calls for Change from Our Shared Vision: A Path toward Truth and Reconciliation in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2023–33; an Urban Indigenous Community Action Plan (February 2023). ISBN 9781-7387971-1-0.

c. Work with First Light's newly created Municipal Reconciliation Liaison to integrate reconciliation initiatives into operations and governance."

⁴⁸ Abby Cole, "Community Group Has 18 Ways N.L. Cities and Town Can Advance Truth and Reconciliation," CBC News, June 5, 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/first-light-action-9.7223878>.

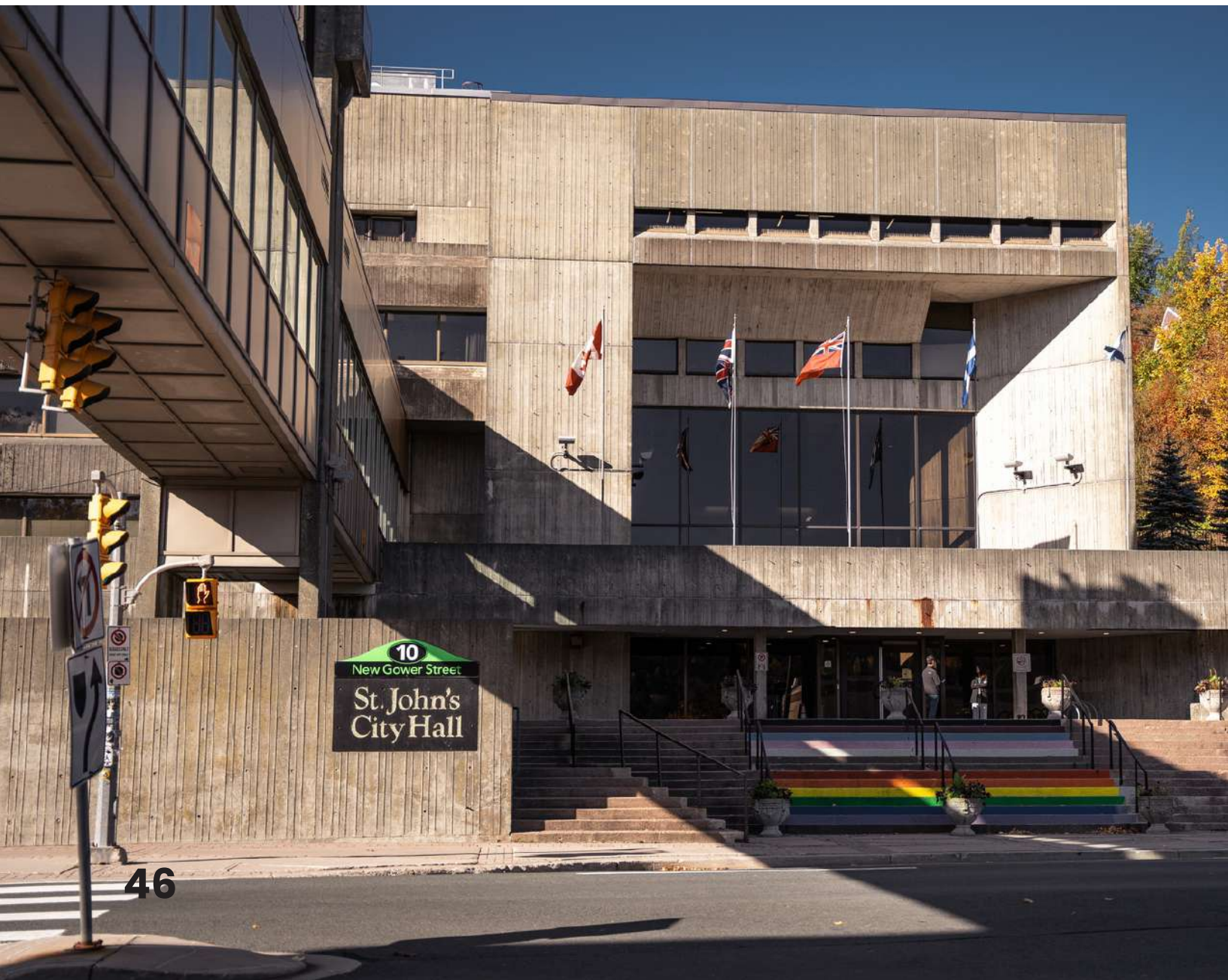
NEXT STEPS

For the City of St. John's:

- Allocate appropriate resources to provide research and policy development support for the Metro Reconciliation Partnership to create a comprehensive multiyear work plan.

For the City of Mount Pearl and the Town of Paradise:

- Allocate appropriate resources to establish another Municipal Reconciliation Liaison for the Regional Reconciliation Circle.



CALL FOR CHANGE 20

Work with all levels of government to ensure that National Indigenous Peoples Day is recognized as an official and statutory holiday.

STATUS : **Partly Achieved**



Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour to lobby for provincial recognition of NIPD

In November 2025, the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour passed Resolution 49 urging its membership to lobby the provincial government to recognize National Indigenous Peoples Day as a statutory holiday and remove the remaining colonial language from the June holiday.

City of Mount Pearl and Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's rename the June Holiday

The "June Holiday" occurs on the Monday nearest to June 24, a date previously called "Discovery Day", a name that was intended to commemorate the date on which John Cabot was believed to have "discovered" the island which was already inhabited by Indigenous people including the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq. The provincial government removed the problematic name in 2020 stating, "Until consultations with the Indigenous governments and organizations are concluded, going forward the June 24 holiday will be temporarily recognized as the June Holiday."⁴⁹

In June 2025, the City of Mount Pearl renamed the "June Holiday" to "National Indigenous Peoples Day (observed)". In June 2026, the Town Council of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's followed suit, renaming the June Holiday to "National Indigenous Peoples Day."⁵⁰ June 2026 also marked the City of Mount Pearl's first NIPD Celebration, hosted on June 20th.

NEXT STEPS

For the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador:

- Pass appropriate legislation in the House of Assembly to replace the June Holiday with National Indigenous Peoples Day. In order to align fully with NIPD, the official statutory holiday would therefore fall on June 21 rather than the Monday nearest June 24.

⁴⁹ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Premier Ball Announces Changes Related to 'Discovery Day' Holiday," June 18, 2020, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2020/exec/0618n08/>.

⁵⁰ City of Mount Pearl, NL, "City of Mount Pearl Renaming June Holiday," Mount Pearl, NL, June 10, 2025, <https://www.mountpearl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/MEDIA-ADVISORY-City-of-Mount-Pearl-Renaming-June-Holiday-June-10-2025.pdf>; Portugal Cove St. Philip's, "Public Council Meeting Highlights," June 4, 2026. <https://pcsp.ca/article/public-council-meeting-highlights/>.

CALL FOR CHANGE 21

Work with the City of St. John's and municipalities of the Northeast Avalon to Indigenize place names.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**



City of St. John's adding Indigenous street names to Reserved Street Names Inventory

In December 2025, the City of St. John's expanded its Reserved Street Names Inventory and added a list of Indigenous street name suggestions to reflect local Indigenous cultures, languages, and connections to the land. The list of 75 street name suggestions was compiled by First Light staff and includes names in Inuttitut, Mi'kmaw, and Innu-aimun.

NEXT STEPS

For First Light:

- Work with the St. John's Regional Fire Department to change policies surrounding street naming restrictions.

For the City of St. John's, City of Mount Pearl and Town of Paradise:

- Include Indigenous street names in the next stage of municipal planning.

For Municipalities of the Northeast Avalon:

- Invite contributions of Indigenous words and phrases, including those in Inuttitut, Mi'kmaw, and Innu-aimun, for municipal street names inventory.



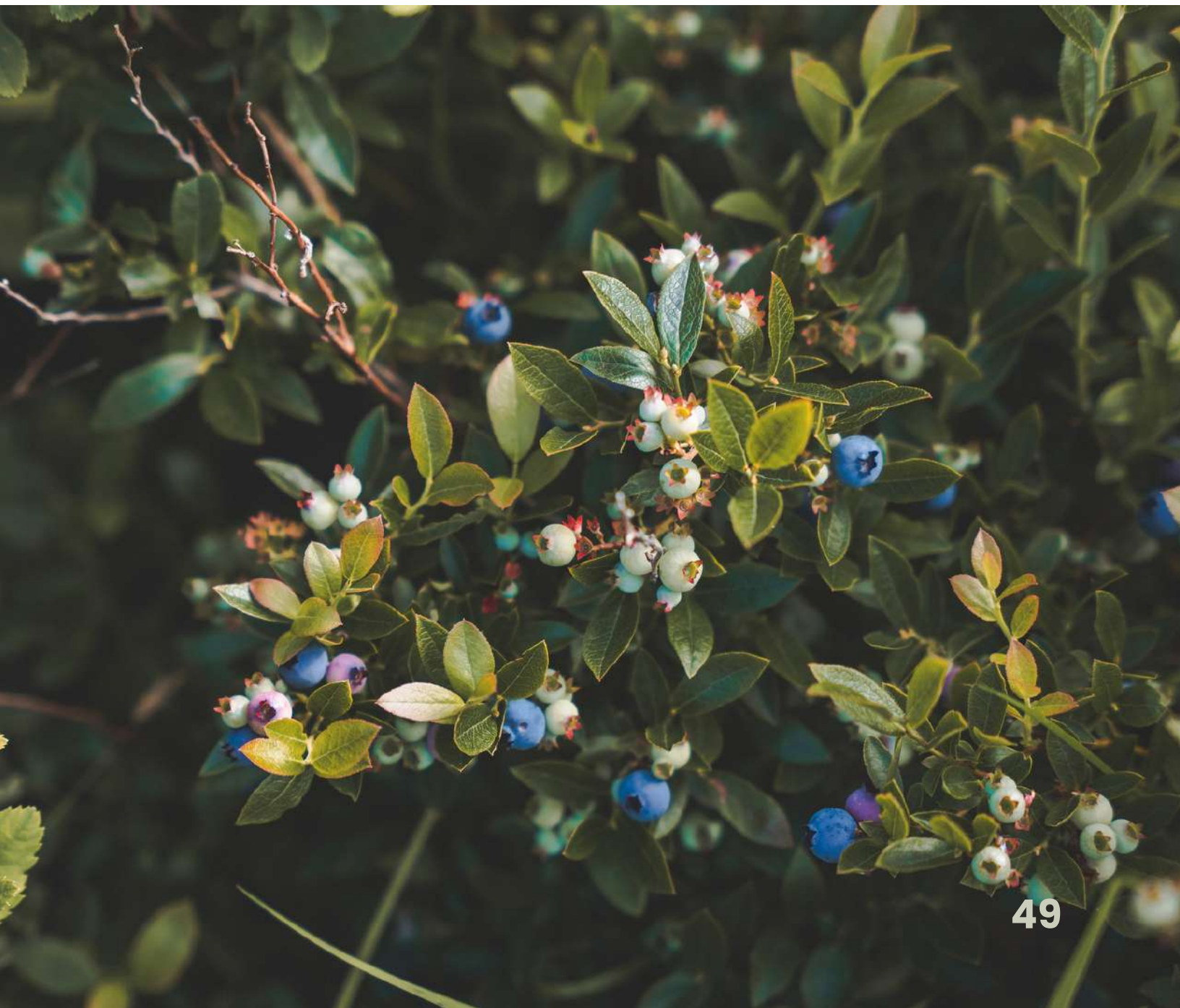
CALL FOR CHANGE 22

Work with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reclaim Indigenous place names.

STATUS : **No Progress Identified**



No progress has yet been made in building partnership with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for advancing this Call for Change.



CALL FOR CHANGE 23

Promote and support formal Indigenous stewardship of public green spaces in the City of St. John's and municipalities of the Northeast Avalon, such as parks and gardens.

STATUS : **Work Underway**

Progress since 2024



First Light and Parks Canada advance Indigenous land stewardship

First Light is working with Parks Canada to advance Indigenous-led research and explore approaches to Indigenous land stewardship. This work includes identifying opportunities for Indigenous land-based healing, strengthening relationships with the land, and caring for public green spaces. Grounded in Indigenous knowledge and community priorities, the partnership will help shape culturally meaningful stewardship initiatives.

First Light Gathering of Voices explores connection to land

In June 2026, First Light held its Summer Gathering of Voices, a seasonal feast with community members, policy makers and invited guests sharing their stories and sharing a meal. Participants shared stories – documented in the event's Message from the Gathering⁵¹ – about Land, their connection to it, and their experiences of Land in urban areas. Overall themes of what was shared included:

- the relationship that urban Indigenous attendees have to the Land is reciprocal and intertwined with their identities,
- that urban Indigenous connection to Land requires deliberate intention, and
- that reconciliation must be demonstrated through action, not symbols.

These themes point to the importance of initiatives – like the project described above by Parks Canada, with its intentional focus on Indigenous land stewardship – that reduce the barriers urban Indigenous people may face in connecting with the Land.



⁵¹ First Light, "Gathering of Voices: Message from the Gathering (Summer 2026)," August 7, 2026, <https://firstlightnl.ca/site/uploads/2026/08/Message-from-the-Gathering-Summer-2026-1.pdf>.

CALL FOR CHANGE 24

Establish a highly visible monument in the City of St. John's to honour the survivors of residential schools and those who never made it home to their families.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**



City of St. John's and First Light: Planning underway

With funding allocated by the City of St. John's, First Light and the City are moving forward with an overall design for the monument. The project will follow a multi-phase approach, allowing an initial monument to be created within the available resources, with other elements of the design to be incorporated as further funding from additional sources is secured. In the coming year, First Light and the City plan to issue a call for initial concepts. Shortlisted artists will receive funding to develop their designs in greater detail. First Light will also convene an intergenerational circle of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, residential school Survivors, and their families. With appropriate supports, the circle will collectively guide key decisions about the monument, including its design and location.

NEXT STEPS

For First Light

- Convene Circle of residential school survivors and their families, with appropriate supports, to gather and collectively make important decisions, such as where the monument will be constructed.
- Publish a call for proposals for the design of the monument.



CALL FOR CHANGE 25

Promote and support the availability of Indigenous healing practices and other appropriate cultural programming within the healthcare system.

STATUS : **Work Underway**

Progress since 2024



Province funds First Light Urban Indigenous Health Clinic

In April 2026, the provincial Department of Health and Community Services committed to supporting the First Light Urban Indigenous Health Clinic, which will begin operations in fall 2026. This commitment involves arrangements for family physician and nurse practitioner staff through existing contract models, and a one-time grant for the 2026–27 fiscal year for non-medical staff. A further commitment in principle has been made to include the funding package for the clinic in the 2027–28 budget. Three First Light publications supported these advocacy efforts, including:

- a public-facing summary of the proposal submitted to the Department of Health and Community Services,⁵²
- a review of system health inequities facing the urban Indigenous population,⁵³ and
- a prospective cost-benefit analysis of the health inequities which could be addressed through the First Light clinic.⁵⁴

Memorial University Medical Students launched a significant advocacy campaign in support of the First Light clinic model in March 2026 for their Provincial Day of Action. This advocacy campaign gathered significant community and political support. We would like to thank these future healthcare providers for using their voices to support urban Indigenous well-being in St. John's, with particular thanks to organizers Abigail Schwartz, Maria Saleeb, and Maggie Burton.

NLHS implementing provincial Ceremony Policy and expanding staffing

As of June 2025, NL Health Services has a formal provincial Indigenous Ceremony Policy that now applies across all zones.⁵⁵ The policy establishes a consistent framework for supporting Indigenous ceremonies. The policy provides direction for safely and respectfully facilitating practices such as smudging, pipe ceremonies, lighting a kullik, use of ceremonial tobacco and traditional medicines, and other ceremonies requested by Indigenous patients, residents, and families.

⁵² First Light, "First Light Indigenous Health Clinic: A Strategic Solution to Urban Indigenous Health Gaps," February 2026, <https://firstlightnl.ca/site/uploads/2026/02/First-Light-Health-Clinic-Proposal-Summary-February-2026.pdf>.

⁵³ First Light, "Falling Through the Cracks: Systemic Drivers of Urban Indigenous Health Disparities in St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador," March 2026, <https://firstlightnl.ca/site/uploads/2026/02/Falling-Through-the-Cracks-Mar-2026-1.pdf>.

⁵⁴ First Light, "The Health Equity Deficit: The Hidden Cost of Urban Indigenous Health Disparities in St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador," March 2026, <https://firstlightnl.ca/publication/the-health-equity-deficit/>.

⁵⁵ NL Health Services, "Indigenous Ceremony Policy," accessed August 1, 2026, https://nlhealthservices.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Indigenous-Ceremony-Policy_IL-PH4_6500-001.pdf.

The new Adult Mental Health and Addictions Treatment Centre in St. John's includes a space for Indigenous ceremony. NLHS also introduced an Indigenous Patient Navigator role for this facility, who will join the growing First Light health team. Recruitment for the new position began in August 2026.

NLHS has also expanded the Indigenous Patient Navigator (IPN) program by one staff member and adjusted contract terms so that urban Indigenous individuals can access the IPN services. This is significant progress for members of the urban Indigenous community, who will now be able to access the cultural support, interpretation, and systems navigation that the IPN team provides.

NLHS embeds Indigenous health and cultural safety in strategic plan

Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services has established Indigenous health and cultural safety as a dedicated area of focus in its 2026–2029 Strategic Plan. Embedding these priorities in the plan represents an important shift from reliance on individual projects toward organization-wide accountability through strategic planning, performance measurement, and reporting.

NEXT STEPS

For the Department of Health and Community Services:

- Allocate funding in the upcoming budget cycle to ensure sustainable multiyear funding for the First Light urban Indigenous Health Clinic.

For NLHS:

- Evaluate whether the Ceremony Policy enables Indigenous patients to participate in ceremony within healthcare facilities, and revise the policy as needed.



CALL FOR CHANGE 26

Decolonize policies and regulations in early childhood education to ensure access to culturally appropriate programming. This must include expanded access to land-based programming for Indigenous children.

STATUS : **Work Underway**



First Light and AECENL collaborate to deliver training

As noted in Call for Change 2, over 100 early childhood educators have earned a certificate through the Roots of Knowledge course, developed by First Light in collaboration with AECENL.

Barrier: Transportation for Children

For children under five, access to off-site land-based programming is often limited by the availability of transportation equipped with appropriate car seats. Without this transportation, Early Learning staff must generally plan activities within walking distance.

The location of the First Light Childcare Centre provides access to the Rennie's River trail, allowing children to participate in land-based programming near the river, as well as in the centre's garden and outdoor play area. Other childcare centres and preschool programs may have fewer options, depending on their proximity to suitable green spaces and whether these spaces can be reached safely. Heavy traffic and inadequate winter maintenance of pedestrian routes can create additional barriers.



Focus Area B: Systemic Discrimination

CALL FOR CHANGE 27

Promote and support the establishment of full-time, paid Indigenous advisory positions in essential areas such as health, law, education, engineering, and government services.

STATUS : **Work Underway**

Progress since 2024



City of St. John's creates Municipal Reconciliation Liaison role

In March 2025, the City of St. John's created a position for an Indigenous Municipal Reconciliation Liaison. This role is funded by the City of St. John's and housed under First Light, giving the Liaison the support of the larger Friendship Centre and a stronger connection to community. This role supports and guides the work of municipal reconciliation which the City of St. John's is undertaking. Funding for the role has now been added to the City of St. John's annual operating budget as a recurring item. The Liaison was also introduced at a City of St. John's Managers' meeting and the City hosted a "Meet and Greet" at City Hall to highlight the role and build relationships with City staff.

Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour creates permanent Indigenous Workers Committee

In November 2025, the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour passed a Resolution 64, a constitutional amendment creating a permanent Indigenous Workers Committee. This creates a permanent, funded structure for Indigenous workers to inform NLFL priorities and decision-making.

Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (NLHS) recruiting Indigenous-specific roles

As of Spring 2026, NL Health Services has hired a Manager of Indigenous Health and Cultural Safety. The position has a particular focus on Mi'kmaw peoples, cultural safety, partnership development, and implementation of the Journey of Collaboration, a longstanding collaboration between NLHS and Mi'kmaw communities of Western Newfoundland.

An Indigenous-specific Manager has been introduced at the Mental Health and Addictions Facility in St. John's, with the successful candidate expected to commence the role in September 2026. A Director of Indigenous Health role has remained vacant.

Need identified: Respectful inclusion and support for Indigenous advisors

As was noted in the 2024 Reconciliation Report, Indigenous advisory positions need support to ensure that their advisory work is taken seriously and not tokenized or dismissed. Strategies must be employed to ensure the retention of Indigenous individuals in these positions, such as housing the advisory position within an Indigenous organization (e.g., the City of St. John's Municipal Reconciliation Liaison being housed at First Light), ensuring adequate antiracism training among employees at the organization (see Call for Change 6), and inclusive human-resources policies (see Call for Change 8).

NEXT STEPS

For employers:

- Ensure that employees, including senior leadership, receive adequate antiracism training including accurate information on Indigenous Peoples of NL to support safe workplaces for those in advisory roles. (See also Calls for Change 6 and 8.)

CALL FOR CHANGE 28

Promote and support efforts to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery and other colonialist concepts such as terra nullius.

STATUS : **Work Underway**

Progress since 2024



SSHRC-funded Project *We're Indigenous and Still Here (WISH)* convenes in St. John's

In June 2026, the project *We're Indigenous and Still Here (WISH)* brought together storytellers, historians and researchers from Saskatoon, Prince Albert and St. John's. This project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), has the overall goal of amplifying stories of urban Indigenous communities that have been excluded from processes of reconciliation. By sharing these stories, the project seeds to expand public and scholarly understanding of reconciliation. The project focuses on the challenge of understanding what reconciliation means for the Métis of the prairies and urban Indigenous Peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador, both of which groups have are often left out of national conversations and federal processes of reconciliation.

Need identified: Better public education to reduce colonialist discrimination

Many Indigenous community members who contributed to this Reconciliation Report emphasized the need for better public education, describing experiences of discrimination rooted in widespread misunderstandings about Indigenous cultures, histories, and present-day realities.

First Light Cultural Diversity Training to include Experiential Learning Program

First Light is expanding its public education offerings to include a 40-hour Experiential Learning program exploring the cultures, histories, and present-day realities of Indigenous Peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador. Combining classroom instruction with cultural activities and land-based learning, the program challenges concepts such as terra nullius and the Doctrine of Discovery while guiding participants toward greater understanding and good relations. See Call for Change 6 for more information.

CALL FOR CHANGE 29

Ensure the full implementation of the City of St. John's and the City of Mount Pearl's commitments under each Council's *Declaration in Support of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

STATUS : **Work Underway**



Call for Change 29 evolves to include City of Mount Pearl's commitment

Call for Change 29 was initially phrased exclusively in terms of the City of St. John's. In September 2024, the City of Mount Pearl issued its own declaration in support of truth and reconciliation,⁵⁶ necessitating an adjustment to the phrasing in this Call for Change.

Under the City of St. John's Declaration, Council committed to work to decolonize the City by making indigenization and antiracism priorities with respect to its governance and municipal services. Council approved the City's first antiracism work plan in December 2025 and is now working to develop an equity lens tool for municipal policymaking and decision-making. The tool includes Indigenous Peoples as a priority group for consideration.

The work of this Call for Change is being led through the new Metro Reconciliation Partnership, which brings First Light together with municipalities of the Northeast Avalon. See Call for Change 19 for more detail.

City of St. John's Municipal Reconciliation Liaison supports this work

See Call for Change 27 for more detail.



⁵⁶ City of Mount Pearl, NL, "Media Advisory: City of Mount Pearl to Sign Declaration in Support of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." <https://www.mountpearl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/RELEASE-City-of-Mount-Pearl-to-Sign-Declaration-in-Support-of-the-Rights-of-Indigenous-Peoples-Sept-16-2024.pdf>

CALL FOR CHANGE 30

Ensure that municipal and provincial policymaking is shaped and informed by appropriate demographic data.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**



First Light conducts research on demographics of correctional facilities

In November 2025, First Light conducted research on the demographics of all five adult correctional facilities in Newfoundland and Labrador. The findings of this study were published in the report *Overrepresented and Undercounted: A Snapshot of Indigenous Adult Incarceration in Newfoundland and Labrador*, which is being leveraged to inform policymaking and as a model for future research in other areas. (See Calls for Change 11 and 35 for more detail.)

The findings also have implications for how the Provincial Corrections Offender Management System (PCOMS) collects data. Because inmates' willingness to identify as Indigenous depends in part on whether they feel safe doing so, progress on Call for Change 30 will require corresponding progress on Call for Change 6, which calls for sector-specific antiracism training.

City of St. John's develops equity lens tool

With funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada's Intersectoral Action Fund, the City of St. John's, with input from several of its advisory committees, is working with NL Health Services and First Light to develop an equity lens for municipal policymaking and decision-making. The tool will help ensure that municipal decisions consistently take into account the circumstances of equity-deserving groups, including Indigenous Peoples.

NEXT STEPS

For the Department of Justice and Public Safety (JPS):

- Mandate foundational training on the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples for all Classification Officers and Correctional Officers in the provincial corrections system.

CALL FOR CHANGE 31

Promote and support urban Indigenous participation on critical governance and advisory boards.

STATUS : Early Steps Taken



City of St. John's Municipal Reconciliation Liaison contributes to advisory bodies

The City of St. John's Municipal Reconciliation Liaison serves on several municipal committees and working groups. In this advisory capacity, the Liaison brings forward the perspectives and priorities of urban Indigenous community members, ensuring that their participation reflects the broader community. The Municipal Reconciliation Liaison currently serves on the following committees and working groups:

- Anti-Racism Working Group
- Inclusion Advisory Committee
- Local Immigration Partnership Committee
- Arts and Culture Committee
- Healthy City Advisory Committee

ArtsNL launches dedicated Indigenous Creation Grant

In June 2024, ArtsNL implemented a new Creation (Indigenous Arts) Grant Program – a funding stream exclusively for Indigenous artists, artistic groups, and culture carriers in NL. The program supports creation, development, exhibition, and transfer of knowledge related to Indigenous art forms. ArtsNL continues to maintain its Indigenous Advisory Circle, whose members advise on programming and policy, and help design better supports for Indigenous artists.

NEXT STEPS

For organizations seeking Indigenous participants to serve on advisory committees:

- Allocate appropriate resources to ensure the full and equal participation of volunteer Indigenous advisors. This includes appropriate honorariums that recognize the value of their contributions.
- Provide inclusion and support for Indigenous individuals in advisory positions. See Call for Change 27 for more detail.

CALL FOR CHANGE 32

Promote and support the expansion of interpretation services that are used locally to include Mi'kmaw, Innu-aimun, and Inuktitut.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**



First Light's 2026 Culture Camp builds momentum for Indigenous language revitalization

In March 2026, First Light's annual Culture Camp focused on Indigenous languages. Beginning with the spring Gathering of Voices, Culture Camp brought together community members, storytellers, and supportive organizations for shared learning and helped build momentum for Indigenous language revitalization and related programming in St. John's. First Light is now exploring strategies for sustainable long-term language learning in St. John's, in collaboration with Language Carriers and rights-holding communities across the province.

First Light Health Services: Providing some interpretation services, demand exceeds resources

First Light's Indigenous Patient Navigator (IPN) team provides interpretation in Innu-aimun (both Sheshatshiu and Mushuau dialects) and Inuktitut whenever team members are available. This support helps patients understand their circumstances, express their needs, ask questions, and make informed decisions about their care. However, as noted in the 2024 Reconciliation Report, team capacity is limited and demand consistently exceeds available support. Given that many patients from Labrador speak English as a second language, NL Health Services must expand its own capacity to provide timely, culturally safe interpretation throughout the healthcare system.



CALL FOR CHANGE 33

Work with healthcare providers and community organizations to ensure that urban Indigenous people are able to access services related to mental health, addictions, and recovery free of discrimination.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**

Progress since 2024



First Light Urban Indigenous Health Clinic to begin operations in fall 2026

In fall 2026, First Light will begin operations of the first Urban Indigenous Health Clinic in St. John's. This clinic will provide culturally grounded primary healthcare services to the urban Indigenous community. See Call for Change 25 for more detail.

NLHS opens new Adult Mental Health and Addictions Treatment Centre with Indigenous ceremony space and Indigenous support staff

In April 2025, NLHS opened a new Adult Mental Health and Addictions Treatment Centre in St. John's, which includes a space for traditional Indigenous ceremonies, equipped with infrastructure to support as smudging and lighting a kullik. Staff of this facility includes an Indigenous Patient Navigator and a management position with an Indigenous health focus. See Call for Change 25 for more detail.

NEXT STEPS

For NLHS:

- Allocate funding in the upcoming funding cycle to support research and evaluation to ensure that Indigenous-specific supports at the Adult Mental Health and Addictions Treatment Centre are appropriately supporting Indigenous patients.

CALL FOR CHANGE 34

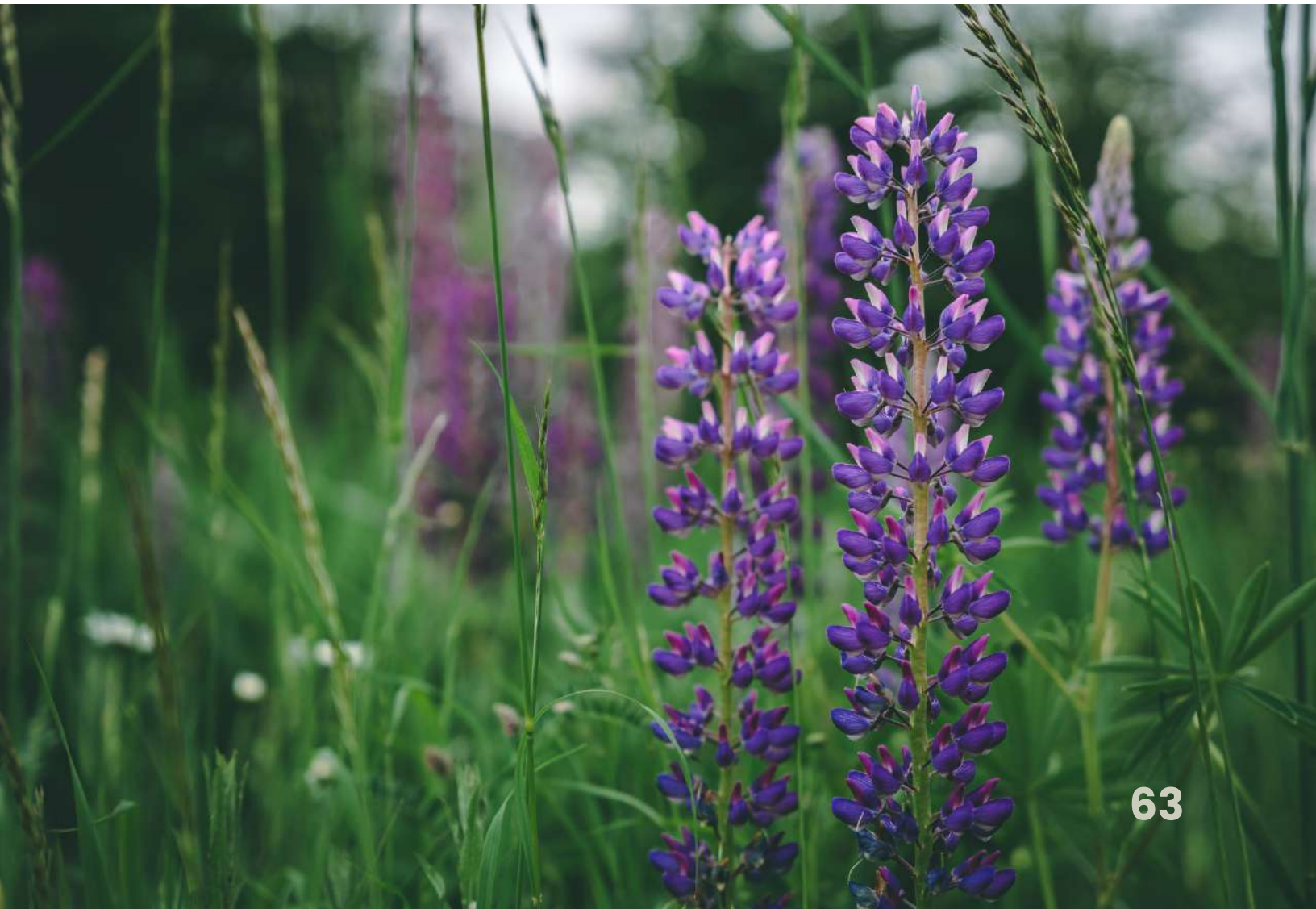
Promote and support the full participation of Indigenous businesses, including social enterprises, in government procurement processes at both the municipal and provincial levels.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**



Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour supports Indigenous equity in Benefit Agreements

In November 2025, the NLFL passed Resolution 10, which will ensure language requiring equity provisions for Indigenous workers be written into Benefit Agreements for public contracts, including local procurement, equity provisions for Indigenous workers, and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) – a core principle of UNDRIP. This creates the structural foundation for Indigenous rights in union standards, which can include procurement processes.



Action Area 4: Justice and Human Rights

We envision a city and a province where urban Indigenous people enjoy equal protection of the law and equal access to justice. To realize this vision, we call on all residents of the Northeast Avalon to help advance change in the following ways:

Focus Area A: Cultural and Security Supports

CALL FOR CHANGE 35

Ensure the availability of Indigenous cultural programming within the corrections system.

STATUS : **Partly Achieved**

 Progress since 2024



First Light conducts research on Indigenous over-incarceration

In November 2025, First Light conducted research on the demographics of adult correctional facilities in Newfoundland Labrador. The findings of this study were published in the report *Overrepresented and Undercounted: A Snapshot of Indigenous Adult Incarceration in Newfoundland and Labrador*,⁵⁷ which received significant media and public attention. The research found that 43% of incarcerated individuals in the province were Indigenous. Among women inmates, the rate was even higher at 53%.

On July 7 2026, First Light released two legal guides to support Indigenous individuals who have intersections with the criminal justice system to access their rights to cultural programming and to have their Gladue factors considered in court. The more comprehensive guide, *Claiming Our Rights*, is intended for Indigenous governments and organizations seeking to advance Indigenous rights within the provincial corrections system.⁵⁸ Its companion booklet, *Know Your Rights*, is written for current and former Indigenous inmates to help them understand their legal rights and provide more fully informed instructions to their legal representatives.⁵⁹ Legal Aid NL has distributed copies of these guides to its lawyers across the province.

⁵⁷ First Light, “Overrepresented and Undercounted: A Snapshot of Indigenous Adult Incarceration in Newfoundland and Labrador, 2025,” March 30, 2026.

⁵⁸ First Light, *Claiming Our Rights: A Legal Guide for Indigenous Peoples Navigating Corrections in Newfoundland & Labrador*.

⁵⁹ First Light, *Know Your Rights: A Guide for Indigenous Inmates in Newfoundland & Labrador*.

Department of Justice and Public Safety commits interim funding to provide cultural programming in some institutions

On July 30 2026, the Department of Justice and Public Safety announced \$270,000 in interim funding to maintain the availability of Indigenous cultural programming at the Labrador Correctional Centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and expand delivery of similar programming to the West Coast Correctional Centre in Stephenville and the Bishop's Falls Correctional Centre.⁶⁰ While this is a promising development, long-term, sustainable funding agreements must be established to ensure that cultural programming is consistently available in all institutions across the province.

At the time of writing, negotiations with the Department of Justice and Public Safety are ongoing to restore cultural programming for Indigenous inmates at Her Majesty's Penitentiary in St. John's and the Clarenville Correctional Centre. First Light previously delivered programming at both institutions for a number of years but declined to renew service agreements in 2025 because of chronic underfunding.

NEXT STEPS

For the Department of Justice and Public Safety:

- Maintain appropriate funding levels to ensure the continuity of programming at the Labrador Correctional Centre.
- Allocate funding and commit to a multiyear service agreement to sustain the cultural programming supported by interim funding at the West Coast Correctional Centre and the Bishop's Falls Correctional Centre.
- Allocate funding and commit to a multiyear agreement to restore cultural programming at Her Majesty's Penitentiary and the Clarenville Correctional Centre.
- Allocate funding and commit to a multiyear agreement to establish cultural programming at the Youth Secure Custody facility in Whitbourne.

⁶⁰ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Indigenous Cultural Programming at Correctional Facilities Enhanced - News Releases."

CALL FOR CHANGE 36

Promote and support the implementation of an Indigenous navigator position within the criminal justice and child welfare systems.

STATUS : **Partly Achieved**

 Progress since 2024



The Law Foundation collaborates with First Light to introduce Indigenous Justice Navigator role

In May 2025, The Law Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador provided grant funding to First Light to pilot an Indigenous Justice Navigator position. The position has been providing one-on-one support to community members at various stages of their involvement with the criminal justice system, including court accompaniment, education for community members about legal processes, and support to assert their rights. The Indigenous Justice Navigator has worked alongside legal counsel to advocate for alternative sanctions, discharge planning, and Gladue reports.

The creation of this role partly achieves this Call for Change. However, because the role is supported by grant-based funding, its continuity is at risk without a multiyear funding agreement.

Need identified: More support needed for Indigenous youth in child welfare system

Community contributors emphasized the need for stronger support for Indigenous children, youth, and families involved with the child welfare system. Indigenous children remain significantly overrepresented in care – a continuation of colonial systems that separated them from their families and communities. Today, more Indigenous children are in government care than were ever enrolled in residential schools at one time.⁶¹ While First Light offers programming for Indigenous families, a dedicated navigator is needed to help families understand and move through the child welfare system.

⁶¹ Tara Hahmann, Indigenous Foster Children Living in Private Households: Rates and Sociodemographic Characteristics of Foster Children and Their Households, Indigenous Peoples Thematic Series, April 18, 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/41-20-0002/412000022024001-eng.pdf>.

NEXT STEPS

For the Department of Justice and Public Safety:

- Allocate multiyear funding in the upcoming budget cycle to ensure the continuity of services provided by the Indigenous Justice Navigator to support Indigenous individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system.

For the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being:

- Allocate funding in the upcoming budget cycle for an Indigenous Navigator in the Child Welfare System.



CALL FOR CHANGE 37

Promote and support the availability and use of restorative justice programs.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**



First Light launches SSHRC-funded research on alternative sanctions and restorative justice

In April 2026, First Light received research funding under the Indigenous Innovation and Leadership in Research Network Grants. This project supports data gathering and community guidance conducted through the First Light Advocacy Council, Gatherings of Voices, and Action Circles. In this first phase of the project, First Light is launching an Action Circle on alternative sanctions and restorative justice, which will guide research to answer the question: “What is needed to make alternative sanctions and restorative justice programs a sustainable, culturally relevant and accessible reality for Indigenous people involved in the criminal justice system in Newfoundland and Labrador?” The goal of the project is to support Indigenous organizations’ advocacy for alternative sanctions and restorative justice programming, as well as providing guidance for policymakers on needed action to improve the legal landscape for Indigenous individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system.

Sentencing courts have a legal obligation to support alternative sanctions under Section 718.2(e) of the Criminal Code, which provides that “all available sanctions, other than imprisonment, that are reasonable in the circumstances and consistent with the harm done to victims or to the community should be considered for all offenders, with particular attention to the circumstances of Aboriginal⁶² offenders.”

City of St. John’s integrates restorative justice in Anti-Racism Working Group’s work plan

St. John’s City Council approved the Anti-Racism Working Group’s work plan, which includes a key objective to “explore restorative justice practices to address racial harm, promote healing, and strengthen community accountability.” To advance this objective, the Working Group is undertaking a jurisdictional scan of restorative justice programs in government municipal contexts, and specifically municipalities. On June 16, 2026, the City of St. John’s hosted a collaboration and learning event focused on restorative justice in collaboration with Community Justice Connect, an initiative of the NL Human Rights Commission and Relationships First. Additionally, planning is underway for public forums as well as enhancing educational opportunities for schools related to antiracism.

⁶² Criminal Code, c. C-46 § 718.2 (e) (1985), <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-46/section-718.2.html>.

Funding discontinued for Relationships First Newfoundland and Labrador

Relationships First Newfoundland and Labrador (RFNL) supports the use of restorative justice principles and practices in education, community, criminal-legal, and other contexts. Housed at Memorial University's Faculty of Education, RFNL has provided professional learning, resource development, community engagement, and circle facilitation.

RFNL's funding contract with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development expired on June 30, 2026 and was not renewed. In K-12 education, schools will increasingly depend on the capacity of Safe and Inclusive School itinerants, as well as individual educators and administrators, to continue the work to embed restorative justice principles in school culture. A new Safe and Caring Schools policy is under development and restorative justice will be foundational to it.

The Department of Justice and Public Safety funded RFNL for its first three years, but a recent request for continued funding was unsuccessful. An application to establish RFNL as an official Memorial University centre – providing institutional recognition and a permanent organizational home rather than operating or staffing support – was also unsuccessful.

NL Human Rights Commission: Supports conflict resolution and connection for conflicts outside the justice system

As noted in the 2024 Reconciliation Report, Community Justice Connect is a program run by the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission which provides conflict resolution services to Indigenous, racialized, and religious minorities as well as organizations that are involved in conflict with persons or organizations from one of these designated groups and who are committed to maintaining respectful relations.

NEXT STEPS

For the Department of Justice and Public Safety (JPS):

- Allocate multiyear funding in the upcoming budget cycle to (a) sustain already-existing restorative justice programs in Indigenous communities across the province; and (b) support the development of similar Indigenous-led programs in urban areas, including St. John's.

CALL FOR CHANGE 38

Promote and support the implementation of Gladue reports in sentencing.

STATUS : **Partly Achieved**

Progress since 2024



Government of Newfoundland and Labrador commits funding for Gladue Reports

The 2026 Provincial budget includes \$162,000 for the Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network (NAWN) to continue their Gladue Writer program, which began in the fall of 2024. The grant is a promising step toward sustained funding to ensure Indigenous people in the province who are involved in the criminal justice system can access to their legal right to have their Gladue factors considered in court.

First Light publishes Legal Guides

On July 7 2026, First Light released two legal guides⁶³ to support Indigenous individuals who have intersections with the criminal justice system access their rights to cultural programming and to have their Gladue factors considered in court. (See Call for Change 35 for more detail.)

NEXT STEPS

For the Department of Justice and Public Safety (JPS):

- Allocate long-term funding in the upcoming budget cycle to support Gladue writer programs.
- Mandate training for all actors in the legal system to improve awareness of Indigenous offenders' right to request a Gladue report.



⁶³ First Light, Know Your Rights: A Guide for Indigenous Inmates in Newfoundland & Labrador; First Light, Claiming Our Rights: A Legal Guide for Indigenous Peoples Navigating Corrections in Newfoundland & Labrador.

Focus Area B: Law Reform

CALL FOR CHANGE 39

Advocate for the implementation of stronger civilian oversight of police services, including the creation of a Police Oversight Board that is independent of police, civilian-led, politically neutral, and representative of the province's diverse communities.

STATUS : **Early Steps Taken**

Progress since 2024



Law Enforcement Oversight Commission Act passed but not yet implemented

In March 2025, the NL House of Assembly passed the Law Enforcement Oversight Commission Act (LEOC), which will replace the existing complaints process under the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary Act, 1992. The new Act establishes a more empowered and truly independent commissioner to receive and investigate (non-criminal) complaints concerning RNC officers, initiate investigations where matters of public interest arise, review RNC policies and procedures, and publish de-identified summaries of decisions.

These changes reflect several recommendations from *Building Trust, Restoring Confidence*, a 2022 report developed by the First Voice Working Group on Police Oversight under the leadership of First Light. That report called for stronger and more transparent complaints processes, alongside an independent, civilian-led Police Oversight Board representative of the province's diverse communities. Although the Act received Royal Assent on March 18, 2025, it will not take effect until proclaimed.

Policing survey underscores concerns about accountability and public confidence

In May 2025, the Policing Transformation Working Group, established in 2023 to evaluate NL's system of policing, released the results of a province-wide public survey on police services.⁶⁴ First Light was among the community organizations that provided input into the survey's design. The results illustrate a striking lack of public confidence in policing among residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

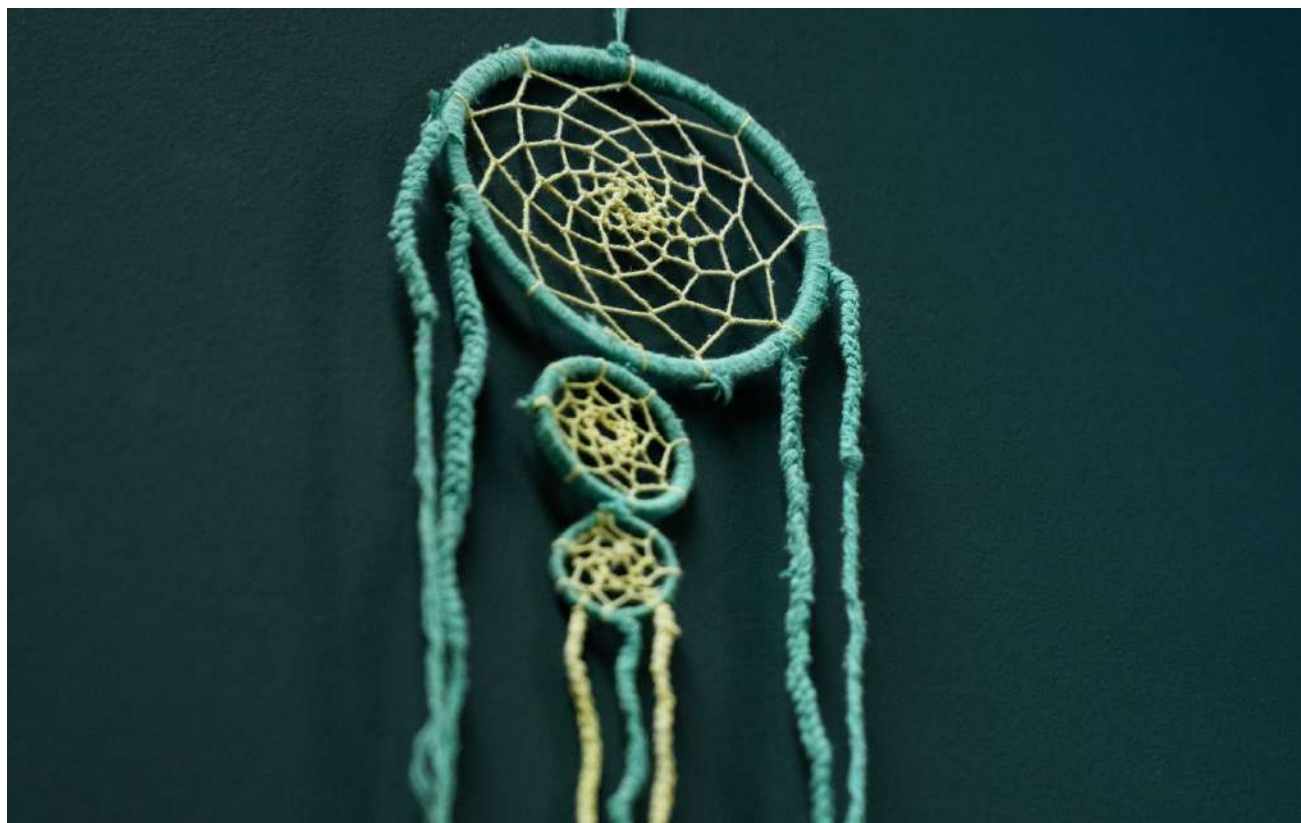
Approximately 4,500 people from 240 communities responded. The survey found that Indigenous individuals were less likely to expect that police officers would respond to their reports of crime. Only one-third of all respondents believed police officers are held accountable for misconduct, with concerns about accountability particularly pronounced among Indigenous and low-income respondents. The findings reinforce the need for a system of police oversight and governance that is independent, transparent, accessible, and trusted by the public.

⁶⁴ Quality of Care NL, "Policing Transformation Working Group Public Survey on Policing Services – Results," May 14, 2025, https://www.gov.nl.ca/jps/files/Policing-Survey-Summary_Community_May-2025.pdf.

Justice Minister commits to introducing comprehensive Police Act

In March 2026, Minister of Justice and Public Safety Helen Conway Ottenheimer committed to reviewing the Law Enforcement Oversight Commission Act and introducing a broader and more comprehensive Police Act in the fall of 2026.⁶⁵ First Light has continued to engage with the Minister and senior officials at the Department of Justice and Public Safety on both initiatives, including through meetings and several written submissions to the Policing Transformation Working Group.⁶⁶

First Light has emphasized that any new policing legislation should build on the foundation laid by LEOC and the community-driven recommendations in *Building Trust, Restoring Confidence*. Priorities must include strengthening civilian governance, public accountability, and Indigenous representation across police oversight and governance bodies. While details of the proposed Police Act have not yet been made available, its development is an important opportunity to modernize policing across the province and make both police services more transparent, accountable, and responsive to the communities they serve.⁶⁷



⁶⁵ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Minister Conway Ottenheimer Commits to Action on Police Oversight - News Releases," March 3, 2026, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2026/jps/0303n02/>.

⁶⁶ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Minister Conway Ottenheimer Commits to Action on Police Oversight - News Releases," March 3, 2026, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2026/jps/0303n02/>.

⁶⁷ VOCM, "Justice Minister Responds to Issues Raised by Former RNC Officer," May 12, 2026, <https://vocm.com/2026/05/12/298907/>.

CALL FOR CHANGE 40

Advocate for the adoption and full implementation of UNDRIP at all levels of government.

STATUS : **Partly Achieved**



City of St. John's, Government of Canada, City of Mount Pearl: Work underway to implement UNDRIP

As noted in the 2024 Reconciliation Report, the City of St. John's and the Government of Canada have made commitments to implement UNDRIP.

In September 2024, the City of Mount Pearl issued a declaration in support of truth and reconciliation. This declaration commits the city to supporting and promoting the principles of UNDRIP.

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador: No progress yet

Since the 2024 Reconciliation Report, there has been no change in the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador with regard to this Call for Change. The province has yet to endorse or adopt UNDRIP, and in some cases has actively resisted core principles of the international human rights instrument. This has been the case particularly with policymaking that is inconsistent with Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

NEXT STEPS

For the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador:

- Make a commitment in principle to adopt UNDRIP and develop an implementation plan in collaboration with all Indigenous groups in the province, including urban Indigenous communities.

For municipalities of the Northeast Avalon:

- Allocate appropriate resources in the upcoming budget cycle to provide research and policy development support for the Metro Reconciliation Partnership to create a comprehensive multiyear work plan.

CALL FOR CHANGE 41

Advocate for the legal recognition of Mi'kmaw, Innu-aimun, and Inuktitut as official languages of Newfoundland and Labrador.

STATUS : **No Progress Identified**



First Light conducts preliminary research on legal recognition of Indigenous languages

Starting in July 2026, the First Light research team has begun preliminary research on legal recognition of Indigenous languages. This work is a component of the WISH project. See Call for Change 4 for more detail.

Legal recognition of Mi'kmaw, Innu-aimun, and Inuktitut/Inuttitut are crucial components of supporting equitable access to services for individuals for whom one of these languages is their first language. Legal recognition would support the provision of interpretation in essential services, such as healthcare. Without such services, Indigenous patients who are not fluent in English or French may be unable to fully understand or consent to medical procedures when the physician does not speak their language. This creates significant barriers to health equity and poses ethical and legal questions for physicians and surgeons.

Legal recognition also supports government services in translating important documentation so that all Indigenous people can have a more equitable level of access to information about government services compared to other Canadians who speak English or French.

NEXT STEPS

For First Light:

- Mobilize findings from First Light's language research to increase the visibility and everyday use of Indigenous languages in St. John's, including through public spaces, programming, events, and learning opportunities.
- Coordinate with Indigenous organizations throughout the province to ensure that language revitalization efforts in St. John's complement – and contribute to – the supports available in other communities. (See Call for Change 4.)

CALL FOR CHANGE 42

Seek a formal apology from the provincial government for the legacy of harm that resulted from the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the Terms of Union with Canada in 1949. Such an apology must be drafted in full collaboration with all Indigenous groups in the province, including urban Indigenous people, and should become a foundation for establishing a renewed relationship between the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Indigenous Peoples in the province.

STATUS : No Progress Identified



SSHRC-funded Project We're Indigenous and Still Here (WISH) convenes in St. John's

In June 2026, We're Indigenous and Still Here (WISH) brought together storytellers, historians, and researchers from Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and St. John's. The project amplifies the histories and experiences of urban Indigenous communities that have often been overlooked in public understandings of reconciliation. In Newfoundland and Labrador, this includes examining the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from the negotiations and Terms of Union with Canada in 1949. See Call for Change 28 for more detail.





Reflection

The Urban Inuk

I grew up in the city.

Not on the land.

I grew up with pavement
beneath my feet,
streetlights instead of stars
and northern lights
and roads I learned to navigate
before I ever learned
how to navigate the land

This city is still home.

But somewhere inside me
was a home
I hadn't yet learned how to reach

I was taught about my people
before I was taught about myself

I remember the books
The way they described "eskimos"
The words.
The pictures.
The stories.

They made us sound
like something from somewhere else,
something wild
something to be explained

As a child,
you don't always question the books

So when they called me "Savage"
when they laughed
and said I live in an igloo

When they called me an animal killer
Because my people hunted

What does a child say?

I pretended to be a different race
To escape who I was

I didn't know about myself
to defend myself

I only knew that being Inuk
was something they had
turned into a joke

Not a culture.

I was ashamed
of being different

Too dark.

I looked at myself through eyes
that already decided
who I was supposed to be

I didn't know how
to love the parts of myself that
everyone seemed so comfortable
to make fun of

I was adopted.

And my parents
really did try so hard
to learn and
to teach.





But there were no resources
That knew how to explain me,
or our culture

No guidebook on raising children
Let alone
an Inuk child

When you don't know
the things you were never taught

They were trying
to build a bridge
with the pieces
they were given.

And I was the child
standing on the other side

They went searching
with the little pieces they had
the small things
a story here,
a tradition there,
whatever they could find
to place into my hands
and say

"This is yours"

But how do you teach
a language, traditions and the land
when you were never taught yourself

They were learning too.

And I was a child
Who only knew that

Something was missing
So I pushed it away

Years passed
And now,

I am turning back.

But I come with questions
instead of answers

Sometimes I watch
other Inuit
and wonder

What would it feel like
to know something
without having to ask?

To carry my language
in my mouth
like its always lived there

To know the land,
the traditions,
the language,
the stories

Sometimes I feel like
I am standing
on the edge of a circle

Waiting, watching, listening
for someone to tell me where I belong

I have lived here
My whole life

The city raised me.

The streets know
the sound of my footsteps

The buildings have
watched me grow

This is home too.

But sometimes I feel displaced
inside a place
that has always been mine.

I used to think
I had to choose

The city
or the land.

The person I became
or the person I might have been

But maybe I don't have to choose.

Maybe being Indigenous
doesn't require me
to have known everything
from the beginning

I can learn
slowly,
awkwardly
with questions
with mistakes

With words
I don't know how to pronounce yet

I pushed it away
because I was taught
that there was something to be
ashamed of.

But now I am old enough
to know the shame
was never mine

It belonged to the
people who taught
me to be ashamed

I am still learning
what it means to be Inuk

But maybe being Inuk
isn't something
I have to prove

Maybe its something
I am allowed to return to

A language
I can learn

A land I can
listen to

A culture
I can reach for

A history
I can carry forward
even if I am still
learning how to hold it

I spent so long standing





at the edge
of the circle,

waiting for someone
to tell me where and
how I belong

But maybe I
was always there

But I just couldn't see myself
Through my own eyes yet

So now I am turning back

Not because I found
all the answers

But for the first time

I know what questions
are mine to ask

And this time,

when I reach for the pieces
of myself

I won't question

"Is this really mine?"

I will say

"This is mine.
This was always mine"

And now

I am learning
How to come home

Barbara Penney





Task List



Task List

The following table outlines the next steps First Light has identified for each relevant decision-making group. We encourage members of the general public to advocate for these changes within their own circles of influence.

ASSOCIATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR (AECENL)

Call for Change: 2

Land-Based Content
in Early Childhood
Education



Continue rollout of Roots of Knowledge course to meet target 600 ECEs.



Plan for continuous improvement and/or expansion of the Roots of Knowledge course.

p. 20

BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYERS

Call for Change: 6

Sector-Specific
Antiracism Training



Ensure that senior and leadership roles complete comprehensive antiracism training that includes Indigenous-specific content.

p. 26



Implement policies mandating that all new hires complete foundational training on Indigenous histories, cultures, and sector-specific content as part of the onboarding process.

Call for Change: 8

Inclusive Human
Resources Policies



Foster more inclusive workplaces by undertaking comprehensive training for leadership roles and foundational training for all employees on cultural humility and the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.

p. 28

Call for Change: 9

TRC 92 Business
Network

p. 29

Call for Change: 10

Recruitment and
Retention

p. 30

Call for Change: 27

Indigenous Advisory
Positions in Essential
Areas



Ensure that employees, including senior leadership, receive adequate antiracism training including accurate information on Indigenous Peoples of NL to support safe workplaces for those in advisory roles.

p. 56

See also Calls for Change 6 and 8.

CITY OF ST. JOHN'S

Call for Change: 17  Begin building relationships with First Light and the urban Indigenous community to help guide planning in service delivery in future years. p. 41
Safe, Affordable and
Reliable Transportation

Call for Change: 19  Allocate appropriate resources to provide research and policy development support for the Metro Reconciliation Partnership to create a comprehensive multiyear work plan. p. 46
Decolonize Municipal
Planning

Call for Change: 21  Include Indigenous street names in the next stage of municipal planning. p. 48
Indigenize Place Names

CITY OF MOUNT PEARL

Call for Change: 19  Allocate appropriate resources to establish another Municipal Reconciliation Liaison for the Regional Reconciliation Circle. p. 46
Decolonize Municipal
Planning

Call for Change: 21  Include Indigenous street names in the next stage of municipal planning. p. 48
Indigenize Place Names

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Call for Change: 1  Expand representation on the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee to include all Indigenous groups in the province, including urban Indigenous Peoples.
K-12 Curriculum
Redevelopment  Conduct a full review of the K-12 curriculum to identify the most severe areas of Indigenous misrepresentation and prioritize areas requiring urgent change.
 Ensure full public transparency throughout the curriculum redevelopment process. p. 19
 Develop and publish a clear plan with timelines for completing curriculum redevelopment
 Allocate funding in the upcoming budget cycle to support interim measures, including teacher training and the distribution of Indigenous-developed educational materials.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES (HCS)

Call for Change: 25  Allocate funding in the upcoming budget cycle to ensure sustainable multiyear funding for the First Light urban Indigenous Health Clinic. p. 53
Healing Practices and
Cultural Programming

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY (JPS)

Call for Change: 15

No-Discharge-into-Homelessness Policy in NL



In collaboration with community service providers, implement a policy requiring that comprehensive discharge plans for all inmates be put in place before their release date. This policy must explicitly prohibit anyone from being discharged into homelessness.

p. 39

Call for Change: 30

Data-Driven policymaking



Mandate foundational training on the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples for all Classification Officers and Correctional Officers in the provincial corrections system.

p. 59

Call for Change: 35

Cultural Programming in Corrections



Maintain appropriate funding levels to ensure the continuity of programming at the Labrador Correctional Centre.



Allocate funding and commit to a multiyear service agreement to sustain the cultural programming supported by interim funding at the West Coast Correctional Centre and the Bishop's Falls Correctional Centre.

p. 65



Allocate funding and commit to a multiyear agreement to restore cultural programming at Her Majesty's Penitentiary and the Clarendville Correctional Centre.



Allocate funding and commit to a multiyear agreement to establish cultural programming at the Youth Secure Custody facility in Whitbourne.

Call for Change: 36

Justice and Child Welfare Systems Navigators



Allocate multiyear funding in the upcoming budget cycle to ensure the continuity of services provided by the Indigenous Justice Navigator to support Indigenous individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system.

p. 67

Call for Change: 37

Restorative Justice Practices



Allocate multiyear funding in the upcoming budget cycle to (a) sustain already-existing restorative justice programs in Indigenous communities across the province; and (b) support the development of similar Indigenous-led programs in urban areas, including St. John's.

p. 69

Call for Change: 38

Gladue Implementation



Allocate long-term funding in the upcoming budget cycle to support Gladue writer programs.



Mandate training for all actors in the legal system to improve awareness of Indigenous offenders' right to request a Gladue report.

p. 70

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SUPPORTS AND WELL-BEING (SSWB)

Call for Change: 15

No-Discharge-into-Homelessness Policy in NL



Update policies on applying for income supports and other social programs to allow for processing of applications from individuals while they are incarcerated, with benefits to begin immediately upon release. Coordination with JPS staff involved in developing discharge plans will be required.

p. 39

Call for Change: 36

Justice and Child Welfare Systems Navigators



Allocate funding in the upcoming budget cycle for an Indigenous Navigator in the Child Welfare System

p. 67

FIRST LIGHT

Call for Change: 7

Antiracism in
Professional Licensing
Standards



Continue making connections with licensing bodies in essential areas, focusing first on those where Action Circles are established (i.e. justice and health).

p. 27

Call for Change: 8

Inclusive Human
Resources Policies



Undertake research regarding inclusive human-resources policies and decolonizing workplace processes so as to support business-related Calls for Change (9-10)

p. 28

Call for Change: 12

Service Delivery and
Demographic Data



Collaborate with service delivery agencies to ensure that Indigenous residents in nonmarket housing have access to culturally appropriate programming and spaces.

p. 34

Call for Change: 18

Food Security



Continue to build and expand food security initiatives for urban Indigenous community members

p. 43

Call for Change: 21

Indigenize Place Names



Work with the St. John's Regional Fire Department to change policies surrounding street naming restrictions.

p. 48

Call for Change: 41

Legal Recognition of
Indigenous Languages
in NL



Mobilize findings from First Light's language research to increase the visibility and everyday use of Indigenous languages in St. John's, including through public spaces, programming, events, and learning opportunities.

p. 74



Coordinate with Indigenous organizations throughout the province to ensure that language revitalization efforts in St. John's complement – and contribute to – the supports available in other communities. (See Call for Change 4.)

INDIGENOUS ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Call for Change: 31

Urban Indigenous
Participation in
Decision-Making



Allocate appropriate resources to ensure the full and equal participation of volunteer Indigenous advisors. This includes appropriate honorariums that recognize the value of their contributions.

p. 60



Provide inclusion and support for Indigenous individuals in advisory positions. See Call for Change 27 for more detail.

MARTIN FAMILY INITIATIVE (MFI)

Call for Change: 2

Land-Based Content
in Early Childhood
Education



Review, augment and improve toolbox training materials.

p. 20

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

Call for Change: 4

Support Programs
in Indigenous
Languages



Work toward the establishment of language proficiency courses in Innu-aimun and Mi'kmaw, dedicating sufficient resources to support language carriers.

p. 23



Continue to build support for language carriers to guide students in learning Inuttitut.

METROBUS TRANSIT

Call for Change: 17

Safe, Affordable and
Reliable Transportation



Prioritize Call for Change 17 in the upcoming fiscal year

p. 41

MUNICIPALITIES OF THE NORTHEAST AVALON

Call for Change: 21

Indigenize Place Names



Invite contributions of Indigenous words and phrases, including those in Inuttitut, Mi'kmaw, and Innu-aimun for municipal street names inventory.

p. 48

Call for Change: 40

UNDRIP
Implementation



Allocate appropriate resources in the upcoming budget cycle to provide research and policy development support for the Metro Reconciliation Partnership to create a comprehensive multiyear work plan.

p. 73

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR HEALTH SERVICES

Call for Change: 15

No-Discharge-into-
Homelessness Policy
in NL



Address gaps faced at discharge by patients on the IPN caseload. This could be done by: a) implementing a policy to align discharge time for Indigenous patients on the IPN caseload with the IPN schedule, or b) allocating funding for a 24-hour call schedule for St. John's-based IPNs.

p. 39

Call for Change: 25

Healing Practices and
Cultural Programming



Evaluate whether the Ceremony Policy enables Indigenous patients to participate in ceremony within healthcare facilities, and revise the policy as needed.

p. 53

Call for Change: 33

Access to Mental
Health and Addictions
Services



Allocate funding in the upcoming funding cycle to support research and evaluation to ensure that Indigenous-specific supports at the Adult Mental Health and Addictions Treatment Centre are appropriately supporting Indigenous patients.

p. 62

POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Call for Change: 3

Indigenous Content
in Post-Secondary
Programs



Begin working toward collaborative relationships to co-develop content on antiracism and the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.

p. 21

PREMIER OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Call for Change: 20  Pass appropriate legislation in the House of Assembly to replace the June Holiday with National Indigenous Peoples Day. In order to align fully with NIPD, the official statutory holiday would therefore fall on June 21 rather than the Monday nearest June 24. p. 47

Call for Change: 40  Make a commitment in principle to adopt UNDRIP and develop an implementation plan in collaboration with all Indigenous groups in the province, including urban Indigenous communities. p. 73

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Call for Change: 6  Prioritize building foundational knowledge among professionals working in essential areas by providing adequate training on the histories and cultures of Indigenous Peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador. p. 26

PROVIDERS OF SHELTER SPACE

Call for Change: 15  Ensure all staff complete mandatory training on cultural humility, Indigenous cultures and histories, intergenerational trauma, anti-oppressive practice, and antiracism intervention. p. 39

TOWN OF PARADISE

Call for Change: 19  Allocate appropriate resources to establish another Municipal Reconciliation Liaison for the Regional Reconciliation Circle. p. 46

Call for Change: 21  Include Indigenous street names in the next stage of municipal planning. p. 48



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Index

2SLGBTQIA+ people, 3, 9, 35, 39

A

Action Circles, 3, 7, 8, 27, 68

Adult Mental Health and Addictions Treatment Centre, 53, 62

Adult Mental Health and Addictions Treatment Centre, 53, 62

antiracism, 5, 13, 21, 25–27, 30, 39, 56, 58–60, 68
 professional and sector-specific training, 5, 13, 25, 26, 30, 56, 59
 municipal policy, 58

Archaeology Office, Provincial, 19

ArtsNL, 60

Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL), 20, 27, 54

B

Basic Income Pilot, 40

Beothuk, 1, 47

Bishop's Falls Correctional Centre, 3, 11, 65

Building Trust, Restoring Confidence, 71, 72

C

Calls for Change, 3–8, 13, 17–75

 priority Calls for Change, 4, 5, 13

 progress updates, 17–75

 Task List, 82–89

Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 45

caribou hunting, 15, 19

ceremony in healthcare, 52, 53

child welfare system, 41, 66, 67

City of Mount Pearl, 44–48, 58, 73

 Declaration in Support of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 44, 58, 73

 National Indigenous Peoples Day, 45, 47

City of St. John's, 3, 9, 42, 44–46, 48, 51, 55, 56, 58–60, 68, 73

 equity lens, 58, 59

 Heritage Strategic Plan, 45

 Municipal Reconciliation Liaison, 45, 55, 58, 60

 neighbourhood planning, 44

 Reserved Street Names Inventory, 48

Claiming Our Rights, 10, 64, 70

Clareville Correctional Centre, 11, 65

College of the North Atlantic, 21

colonialism, 4, 5, 12, 13, 17, 57

 Doctrine of Discovery, 57

 terra nullius, 57

Community Justice Connect, 68, 69

correctional facilities, 9–11, 31, 38, 59, 64, 65

 cultural programming, 10, 11, 64, 65

 demographic research, 9, 10, 31, 59, 64

 discharge planning, 31, 38, 39, 41, 66

cost of living, 4, 11, 12, 34, 40

country foods, 42

criminal justice system, 10, 11, 64, 66–70

cultural programming, 10, 11, 52, 64, 65, 70

cultural safety, 30, 53, 55

D

data collection, 31–33, 59
 correctional facilities, 10, 31, 59, 64
 homelessness, 31, 32
Decolonizing Municipal Governance Toolkit, 45
disability benefits, 40
discrimination, 5, 13, 18, 25, 36, 44, 55, 57, 62
 housing, 5, 13, 36
 public education and misinformation, 18, 57
 systemic, 55
Doctrine of Discovery, 57

E

early childhood education, 20, 21, 54
 land-based programming, 54
 Roots of Knowledge, 20, 27, 54
education, 6, 17
 early childhood, 21, 54
 K–12 curriculum, 4, 5, 11, 13, 17–19
 post-secondary programs, 21, 22
 public education, 4, 11, 18, 57
employment equity, 17, 28
End Homelessness St. John's, 4, 12, 25, 31–33
experiential learning, 25, 29, 42, 57

F

First Light, 3, 6–10, 12, 17, 18, 20–22, 25, 27–35, 37, 38, 40–45, 48, 50–59, 61, 62, 64–66, 68, 70–72, 74
 advocacy model, 3, 7
 report development, 8
First Light Urban Indigenous Health Clinic, 3, 9, 52, 53, 62

First Nations, 1, 19
First Voice, 6, 7, 9, 45, 71
Food First NL, 42
food security, 42, 43
 community gardens, 42
 country foods, 42
 school lunch program, 43
food sovereignty, 42

G

Gathering of Voices, 3, 7, 8, 18, 22, 50, 61, 68
Gladue reports and services, 10, 64, 66, 70
government procurement, 63
guaranteed annual livable income, 40

H

Harvey House, 3, 8, 9, 35
healthcare, 25, 27, 38, 39, 41, 52, 53, 55, 61, 62, 74
 ceremony, 52, 53
 cultural safety, 53, 55
 Indigenous Patient Navigators, 38, 39, 53, 61, 62
 mental health and addictions, 21, 53, 55, 62
Her Majesty's Penitentiary, 65
homelessness, 4, 6, 10, 12, 25, 31–34, 38, 39
 emergency shelters, 4, 12, 33
 no-discharge-into-homelessness policy, 10, 38
 Point-in-Time Count, 31
Horizons at 106, 4, 12, 33
housing, 3–6, 8, 9, 11–13, 31, 33–38, 41, 56
 affordability, 5, 13, 31, 36
 crisis in St. John's, 4, 12, 33, 35–37
 non-market housing, 11, 34, 35

private rental market, 13, 36
transitional and supportive housing, 3, 4, 9,
12, 33, 35
human rights, 64, 69, 73

I

Inclusion Case Managers, 9, 35
income support, 38–40
Indigenous advisory positions, 55, 56
 Indigenous Workers Committee, 55
 Municipal Reconciliation Liaison, 45, 55, 58, 60
Indigenous Ceremony Policy, 52, 53
Indigenous Cultural Diversity Training, 21, 27
Indigenous Education Advisory Committee, 17, 19
Indigenous Justice Navigator, 11, 66, 67
Indigenous languages, 20, 22, 23, 48, 61, 74
 Innu-aimun, 20, 22, 23, 48, 61, 74
 Inuktitut, 61, 74
 Inuttitut, 20, 22, 23, 48, 61, 74
 legal recognition, 74
 Mi'kmaw, 20, 22, 23, 48, 55, 61, 74
Indigenous Local Course Policy, 18
Indigenous Patient Navigators, 38, 39, 53, 61, 62
Indigenous Peoples Day, see National Indigenous
Peoples Day
Indigenous Workers Committee, 55
Innu-aimun, see Indigenous languages
Innu Nation, 18, 19
interpretation services, 61, 74
Inuit, 1, 15, 22, 77–79
Inuktitut, see Indigenous languages
Inuttitut, see Indigenous languages

J

Joint Coordinating Committee on Indigenous Rights, 9
justice, see criminal justice system

K

K–12 curriculum, 4, 5, 11, 13, 17–19
Know Your Rights, 10, 64, 70

L

Labrador Air Access Program, 41
Labrador Correctional Centre, 11, 65
Labrador Interpretation Centre, 18
land-based learning and programming, 42, 54
Law Enforcement Oversight Commission Act, 71, 72
Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, 27
legal guides, 10, 64, 70
Lunar Inn, 22, 25, 42

M

Martin Family Initiative, 20
Memorial University of Newfoundland, 19, 21–23, 25, 52
mental health and addictions, 21, 53, 55, 62
Métis, 1, 17, 57
Metrobus, 41
Metro Reconciliation Partnership, 9, 45, 46, 58, 73
Mi'kmaq, 20, 22, 23, 48, 55, 61, 74
minimum wage, 40
municipal reconciliation, 9, 45, 46, 55, 56, 58, 60

N

National Indigenous Peoples Day, 18, 45, 47
Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network, 10, 70
Newfoundland and Labrador Anti-Poverty Coalition, 40
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, 47, 55, 63
Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, 39, 42, 52, 53, 55, 59, 61, 62
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, 12, 33, 37
no-discharge-into-homelessness policy, 10, 38
Northeast Avalon, 3, 5, 9, 17, 31, 33, 44, 45, 48, 50, 58, 64, 73
Nunatsiavut Government, 43
NunatuKavut Community Council, 17, 43
Police Oversight Board, 71
Policing Transformation Working Group, 71, 72
Portugal Cove–St. Philip's, 9, 45, 47
poverty and poverty reduction, 12, 34, 40
 Basic Income Pilot, 40
 disability benefits, 40
 income support, 38–40
 minimum wage, 40
private rental market, 13, 36
professional licensing bodies, 27
Provincial Corrections Offender Management System, 59
public education, 4, 11, 18, 57
public transportation, 41
 accessibility, 41
 after incarceration, 41

O

Onalik, Juliette, 14, 15
Our Shared Vision, 3, 6, 17, 45
Overrepresented and Undercounted, 10, 31, 38, 59, 64

P

PAL Airlines, 41
Parks Canada, 50
Penney, Barbara, 80
place names, 48, 49
 municipal, 48
 provincial, 49
police oversight and reform, 71, 72
 Law Enforcement Oversight Commission Act, 71, 72

Q

Qalipu First Nation, 17, 18

R

Relationships First Newfoundland and Labrador, 69
rent control, 36
residential schools monument, 51
restorative justice, 10, 68, 69
Restoring Good Relations Framework, 3, 7
Right to Food, 42
The Rooms, 18, 19
Roots of Knowledge, 20, 27, 54
Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, 71, 72

S

school lunch program, 43
social enterprises, 63
Steps Taken, Miles to Go, 3, 18
stewardship of public green spaces, 50
St. John's Reconciliation Circle, 3, 9
systemic discrimination, 55

T

Task List, 83–89
Terms of Union with Canada, 4, 11, 75
terra nullius, 57
Town of Paradise, 9, 45, 46, 48
Town of Portugal Cove–St. Philip's, 9, 45, 47
transitional housing, 3, 4, 9, 12, 33, 35
transportation, see public transportation
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,
6, 29, 45

U

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of
Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), 6, 45, 63, 73
urban Indigenous community, 1, 3, 4, 6–9, 12, 13,
17–19, 22, 31, 35, 36, 41–45, 50, 52, 53, 57, 60, 62, 64,
75
The Urban Inuk, 77–80

W

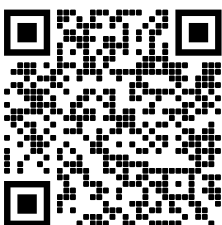
We're Indigenous and Still Here (WISH), 3, 22, 57,
74, 75
West Coast Correctional Centre, 3, 11, 65
women, Indigenous, 3, 6, 9, 10, 27, 31, 64



First Light's mission is to deliver transformative programs and services that empower, uplift, and support Indigenous communities and nations in ways that promote good relations between all.

Through advocacy, research, and social entrepreneurship, we foster inclusive environments that unite Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, promote social well-being, and drive sustainable change.

Guided by principles of trust, respect, and friendship, we aim to build a brighter future where Indigenous Peoples thrive and flourish, leaving a profound and lasting legacy for generations to come.



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