

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Power in Action

Collective response to the systemic crisis of gender-based violence

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Native Women's Association of Canada

EVA BC Annual Training Forum

Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre | September 24, 2026

OPENING

Before anything else, we hold space

Delivered on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

- **The missing**
For Indigenous women and girls — and our men and boys — taken from their families and communities, and for those still missing.
- **The families**
Who have never stopped searching, never stopped speaking, and never stopped insisting their loved ones matter.
- **The survivors**
Whose dignity is not defined by what was done to them — whose voice, loss, grief and safety matter because they matter.
- **The workers in this room**
Survivors, families, advocates, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, frontline and system workers who carry work that is both necessary and heavy.



“POWER IN ACTION” IS NOT ONLY A SLOGAN

It is what happens when belief becomes practice — when a safety plan does not end at a referral, when a missing person report is treated with urgency from the first moment, when a survivor is not required to prove pain to receive care.

It is what happens when governments stop measuring progress by announcements and start measuring it by whether women, girls and gender-diverse people are safer — in their homes, communities, workplaces, streets, schools, shelters, courtrooms and online.



MMIWG2S+ is systemic — not isolated

It is not only a criminal justice issue, a policing issue, a health issue, a poverty issue, a housing issue, a transportation issue, a child welfare issue, or a data issue. It is all of these — because the violence is systemic, built through colonialism, racism, misogyny, jurisdictional neglect and service gaps compounding over time.

231

Calls for Justice

A framework for urgent, coordinated, measurable action — not recommendations to admire from a distance.

NWAC's implementation questions:

Who is responsible? What changed? What is funded? What is measured? Who is at the table? Are Indigenous women shaping policy — or consulted after decisions are made?



What NWAC brought to IFPT advocacy

Feb 2026

Indigenous–Federal–Provincial–
Territorial MMIWG2S+
engagement, plus regular bilateral
work with the MMIWG2S+
Secretariat

9

MMIWG2S+ Working Group
sessions with PTMA representation,
virtual and in-person

8 + 1

Provincial/Territorial Member
Associations and one community
partner delivering engagement
sessions

194

Community participants reached —
families, survivors, frontline
workers shaping national advocacy

The message at the table was direct: progress cannot be defined only by the existence of plans. It must be visible in the lives of families and survivors — in faster, more respectful responses; safer transportation and housing; trauma-informed services; accountable policing; better data; Indigenous-led prevention.



Community Care, Collective Justice

A bilingual MMIWG2S+ advocacy toolkit bridging community experience and political power

Community Care

Produced by aunties, Elders, siblings, neighbours, outreach workers, shelters, transition houses, friendship centres and grassroots organizers — people who notice when someone is missing from the circle, who offer a ride, sit in the emergency room, and refuse to let someone face danger alone.

Collective Justice

Care alone is not enough if systems remain unchanged. Institutions must be accountable. Budgets must reflect the scale of the crisis. Data must not erase Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. Governments must implement the Calls for Justice with timelines, resources and public reporting.



Do not make the survivor carry the system

Too often survivors are expected to become their own case manager, investigator, navigator, evidence collector and counsellor. That is burden-shifting, not safety. A collective response asks each system to hold its part — and to communicate with the others.

● Community programs

Resourced as essential safety infrastructure — not treated as charitable add-ons.

● Police

Respond quickly, respectfully and consistently when Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people are missing or at risk.

● Health care

Recognize violence, coercion and trafficking without judgment.

● Child protection

Stop punishing mothers for violence committed against them; understand coercive control.

● Courts & legal systems

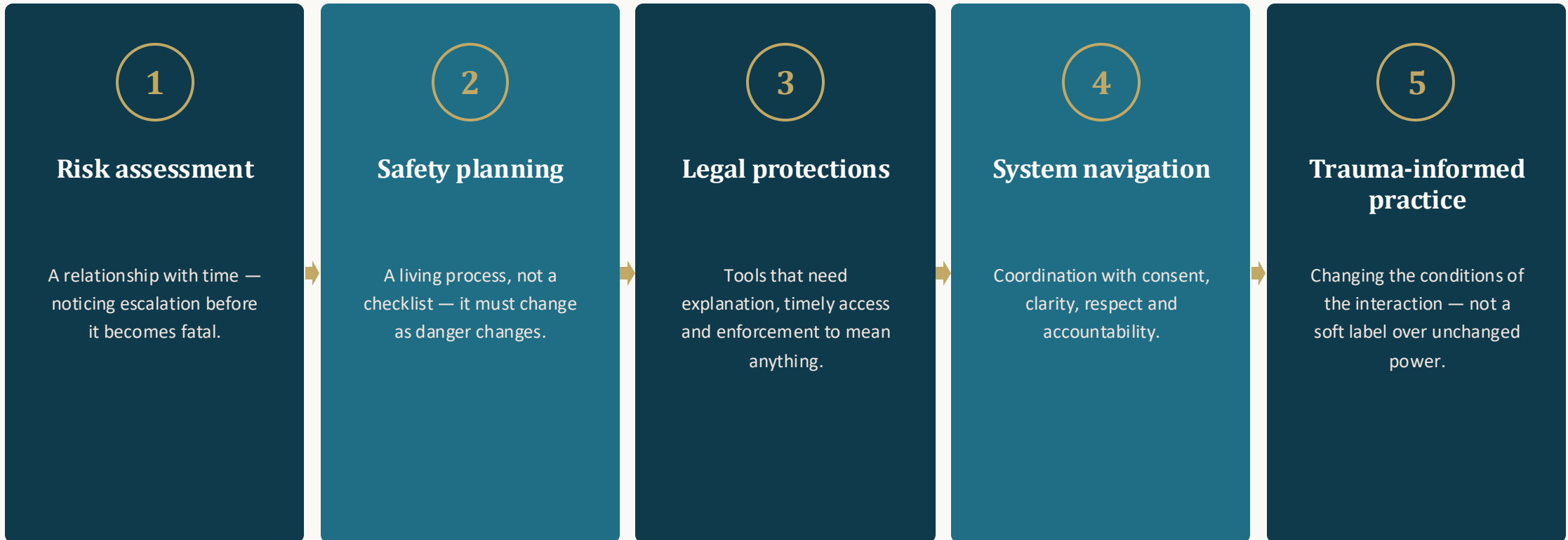
Reduce delay, improve access, and stop forcing survivors to repeat trauma.

● Governments

Fund prevention, not only crisis response.



One life-saving practice, five connected parts



ACCOUNTABILITY AS A FORM OF CARE

Accountability says Indigenous lives are worth the truth. It says families deserve answers, systems must explain delays and gaps, and the burden of proof cannot always fall on families who are grieving.

No family should have to campaign publicly before a search is taken seriously. No family should have to prove their loved one was loved.

Ask locally

- How quickly do we respond when an Indigenous woman is missing?
- Who calls the family, and who explains the process?
- Who tracks patterns — trafficking, repeat offenders, after-hours gaps?
- Who reviews what happened after a serious injury or death?
- Who changes practice as a result?



Fund the people who turn policy into safety

You are often the people survivors trust before they trust any institution — and often underfunded, stretched, and asked to compensate for gaps created elsewhere. A system that relies on exhausted workers is not sustainable. Burnout is not a failure of dedication; it is evidence the work has been under-resourced for too long.

● **Community coordination**

● **Indigenous-led programs**

● **Prevention, always**

● **Rural & remote services**

● **Transportation**

● **Cultural supports**

● **Legal advocacy**

● **Safe housing**

● **Family & survivor participation**



WHAT COLLABORATION MUST LOOK LIKE

Each part of the system has a role

Government

Fund sustained implementation, align policy with the Calls for Justice, report publicly.

Police

Respond urgently, address racism and bias, work with Indigenous advocates.

Health care

Identify violence without judgment; provide trauma-informed, culturally safe care.

Child protection

Stop treating the non-offending parent as the problem; work with communities.

Justice systems

Reduce delay, enforce conditions, protect survivors from retraumatization.

Community programs

Centre survivors, strengthen coordination, share expertise with systems.

Indigenous organizations

Lead from culture and self-determination; hold governments accountable.

The public

Listen, learn, intervene safely, challenge racism and misogyny, demand accountability.



The question is what changes on a Friday night

Many institutions can now say the right words — trauma-informed, reconciliation, culturally safe, survivor-centred. The question is whether those words change what happens when a woman is missing, when a survivor walks into an emergency room, when a mother fears child welfare more than the person harming her.

Measurable change means asking, out loud:

- Do high-risk domestic violence teams include Indigenous expertise?
- Does data identify Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people accurately?
- Do rural and remote survivors have transportation?
- Are families included in missing person processes?
- Can survivors access sexual assault services without police involvement, if that's their choice?
- Are protection orders enforced?
- Do programs have funding to keep staff safe and retain experienced workers?



Seven commitments for this room

1

Make belief operational

Build it into intake, risk assessment, supervision, protocols — not just values.

2

Build relationships before crisis

If you only call when there's an emergency, the relationship is already under pressure.

3

Treat data as responsibility

Count what matters. Do not extract without benefit. Protect privacy and context.

4

Refuse jurisdictional abandonment

When a survivor falls between mandates, close the gap — don't just name it.

5

Centre Indigenous self-determination

Families as decision-makers and rights holders, not clients of systems they didn't shape.

6

Protect the people doing the work

Debriefing, cultural support, rest and supervision — not burnout as proof of commitment.

7

Keep families at the centre

They forced the country to listen. We owe them implementation, not commemoration.



May our collective response be worthy of those we have lost.

May it protect those who are here.

*May it create conditions where Indigenous women and their families
can live fully, safely and freely.*

That is power in action. That is community care. That is collective justice.

Thank you.