

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Alberta Human Rights Commission (Commission) has the mandate to forward the principle that all persons are equal in dignity, rights and responsibilities, to promote multiculturalism, to encourage equality of opportunity, and to promote an environment in which all Albertans can fully participate in and contribute to the cultural, social, economic and political life of Alberta without discrimination.

The Commission has a long history of working with Indigenous communities in Alberta, and has identified Indigenous human rights as a priority. The Commission's *Indigenous Human Rights Strategy* (Strategy) will guide the Commission's practices and initiatives to reduce barriers Indigenous peoples face when seeking to enforce their human rights under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.

This Strategy has several purposes:

- It sets out the principles and values the Commission commits to in working towards reconciliation and change.
- It identifies focus areas.
- It creates space for discussion and deliberation, to learn and identify meaningful steps the Commission will need to take to better serve Indigenous individuals and communities in Alberta.
- It proposes ways in which the Commission will seek advice on programs and resources we should offer, and perspectives we should incorporate into our work with Indigenous communities.
- It aims to increase understanding and inclusion of Indigenous peoples and perspectives in all aspects of the Commission's business.

## **PRINCIPLES AND VALUES**

Murray Sinclair, former chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, defined reconciliation as "ensuring that everything that we do today is aimed at restoring the balance to the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada." It is not only about reconciling the impact of colonialization and policies imposed on Indigenous Peoples (including Indian Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, the dispossession of lands, and cultural

genocide), it is also about understanding our shared history, and how we must develop mutual respect to face our future in a good way.

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Commission's *Indigenous Human Rights Strategy* charts a course for how the Commission will enhance and support Indigenous human rights in the province. Making meaningful institutional change is a long-term commitment that requires ongoing focus and support. Some components of this strategy will be initiated immediately, other components will require sustained effort over several years to be fully and effectively implemented.

An effective strategy must be specific to the unique needs of Indigenous communities. We must recognize that Indigenous communities are diverse, and we must be respectful and responsive to the many cultures, experiences, and needs of Indigenous communities in Alberta. We must confront historical and current racism and discrimination at all levels: individual, community, organizational, systemic, and societal. Research data and information collected from consultations with Indigenous communities and organizations indicate that systemic racism—in the health, education, child welfare, housing, and justice (including policing and corrections) systems—is a major issue facing Indigenous Peoples in Alberta. A key recommendation is for organizations, including the Alberta Human Rights Commission, to focus on addressing barriers to access for Indigenous Peoples in its programs, services, and operations.

The overarching goals of this strategy are:

- To help address and reduce systemic racism against Indigenous peoples in health, education, child welfare, housing, justice (including policing and corrections) and other social systems.
- To meaningfully collaborate with Indigenous communities throughout Alberta to address the racism and discrimination Indigenous people encounter in their day-to-day lives.
- To build capacity and knowledge within and across the Commission to ensure we can serve Indigenous individuals and communities with respect. This must address the accessibility of our processes, relevance of our educational materials, and our awareness of the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples, in all their diversity.
- To strengthen and expand Commission's relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations.

As a support to this Strategy, the Commission will bring together an Indigenous Advisory Circle (Circle) to provide advice on and insight into proposed initiatives. The Circle will be comprised

of members with lived and professional experience and will aim for geographic and cultural inclusion. The Circle will *not* replace broader engagement with Indigenous communities, organizations, and service providers on specific initiatives tied to the implementation of this Strategy.

The Commission's work will be guided by the teachings and directions contained in the *Truth and Reconciliation Final Report* (2015), the *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report* (2019), and the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996). The Commission respects the principles of Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty and right to self-determination, and affirms the principles enunciated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007).

## **STRATEGIC ACTIONS**

All of the Strategic Actions listed below will entail varying levels of engagement with Indigenous communities. A detailed implementation plan will be developed with the guidance of the Indigenous Advisory Circle and will be circulated for input from Indigenous communities, organizations, and service providers.

### **INCREASE THE ALBERTA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION'S CAPACITY TO UNDERSTAND AND ADDRESS INDIGENOUS HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

1. Undertake a Commission-wide external review to identify ways in which the Commission may be inadvertently perpetuating or be complacent towards systemic discrimination against Indigenous Peoples.
2. Build capacity within the Commission through focused training and professional development to enable a deeper understanding of systemic discrimination as experienced by Indigenous individuals and communities.
  - a. Focus on root causes and the ways in which historical policies and programs have impacted, and continue to impact, Indigenous communities and individuals at a systemic level.
3. Expand the Commission's awareness of the Indigenous landscape in Alberta (communities, cultures, organizations, Indigenous history, and current Indigenous social and human rights issues).

- a. Establish a baseline standard of Indigenous knowledge that all Commission staff and Members are required to have. Ensure that new recruits to the Commission either already have this minimum awareness or will obtain it as part of the onboarding process.
  - b. Establish a Commission Training Strategy that incorporates, among other things, Indigenous-specific content that is provided to all staff, management, and members.
    - i. Ensure that Indigenous-specific training and professional development is delivered by qualified Indigenous people or organizations.
    - ii. Continue expanding and exploring learning opportunities and resources for Commission staff and members so that they are able to keep abreast of emerging Indigenous human rights issues and contexts. This will support staff and members in acquiring and honing the specialized tools and skills they need to succeed in addressing discrimination against Indigenous Peoples.
4. Create and enhance opportunities for Indigenous recruitment within the Commission and at all levels.
  - a. Set internal diversity and inclusion targets, including hiring Indigenous staff, management, and Members, to ensure representation at all levels.
  - b. Identify, consider, and address the potential and specific barriers to recruitment that Indigenous people often face.
    - i. Seek input from Indigenous communities and organizations on why it is difficult to attract Indigenous applicants to Commission job postings.
    - ii. Work with GoA Human Resources to identify process changes to screening and recruitment that may be inherently biased against Indigenous (and other under-represented) applicants.
5. Identify and address potential barriers to the retention of Indigenous employees and members.
  - a. Seek input from Indigenous employees on how to make the Alberta Human Rights Commission a fully inclusive and positive workplace for Indigenous people.

**MAKE THE ALBERTA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION'S COMPLAINT PROCESS MORE ACCESSIBLE, MEANINGFUL, AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

6. Revise the human rights complaints process to create pathways for community organizations and individuals who seek to bring forward complaints of systemic discrimination.
  - a. Establish opportunities and procedures to investigate, advance, and resolve systemic complaints addressing Indigenous human rights.
  
7. Improve the Commission's complaints processes (at both Commission and Tribunal levels) to meet the needs of and be more accessible and culturally relevant to Indigenous Albertans.
  - a. Evaluate existing available data on the number of Indigenous complainants, the types of complaints brought to the Commission, and the result of those complaints.
  - b. Engage with Indigenous organizations and service providers to understand what obstacles and deterrents the existing processes present to Indigenous potential complainants.
  - c. Enhance data collection practices through a Disaggregated Demographic Data Collection initiative so barriers are identified and adjustments in complaints processes can be measured and monitored.
    - i. Ensure the data is collected in a culturally safe way and that transparency mechanisms are in place so the public understands what we are doing, how we are doing it, and how the results will be used.
    - ii. Ensure that data sharing and use considers Indigenous communities' concerns and needs.
  - d. Work on ways to accommodate Indigenous potential complainants who experience obstacles and deterrents (including language, literacy, culture, residency, and technology obstacles).
  - e. Modify rules, by-laws, and procedures to make the Alberta Human Rights Commission's enforcement processes more accessible and culturally appropriate for Indigenous individuals and communities.
  - f. Incorporate Indigenous traditions and methods for conflict resolution (such as participation of Elders, use of an eagle feather or other ceremonial traditions, prayer, smudging, and/or other cultural or ceremonial protocols) into dispute resolutions and hearings for Indigenous complainants or respondents who request it.

- g. Design processes from intake to resolution to ensure Indigenous people feel safe, comfortable and confident throughout the Alberta human rights complaints system.
- 8. Identify ways the Commission can help Indigenous complainants navigate jurisdictional issues between the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.

#### **ENHANCE EXTERNAL ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION ON INDIGENOUS HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

- 9. Pursue and advocate for policy, legislative, and program changes that address and reduce systemic discrimination towards Indigenous peoples.
  - a. Ensure that the Commission's educational resources and policy products identify the specific problem of overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in prisons, children in care, addictions, disease, etc., recognizing that this overrepresentation is a result of systemic discrimination.
  - b. Undertake research, cross-jurisdictional reviews, stakeholder engagement, and strategic advocacy on systemic discrimination against Indigenous Peoples.
- 10. Provide public policy feedback/input within the health, education, child welfare, justice (including policing and corrections), and other social sectors, as well as in areas of employment, housing, and services under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.
  - a. Take an active role in legislative and policy reviews, development, and initiatives that have the potential to reduce all forms of racism, including systemic discrimination against Indigenous Peoples.
  - b. Engage with Indigenous organizations and communities on specific human rights considerations/components of policies.
  - c. Work to broaden the Commission's engagement network and ensure sound engagement approaches, particularly on policy initiatives that may be sensitive in nature.
  - d. Share the Commission's work on policy and legislation with Indigenous communities, service providers, and the general public.
- 11. Promote, support, and participate in initiatives that take action on reducing systemic discrimination against Indigenous Peoples.
  - a. Collaborate with Indigenous communities to develop Indigenous human rights information and educational resources for the broader public.
  - b. Advocate that government departments, such as Alberta Education, Alberta Advanced Education, Alberta Health, and Alberta Labour and Immigration, etc., include these materials in their public programming and education initiatives.

## STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

12. Improve the Commission's educational programming and information to meet the needs of and be more accessible to Indigenous Albertans.
  - a. Review existing educational materials with the Indigenous Advisory Circle and Indigenous communities and organizations to ensure they are up-to-date and identify ways to include Indigenous perspectives, issues, and examples to increase Indigenous representation.
  - b. Engage with the Indigenous Advisory Circle and Indigenous communities to identify what information and educational resources Indigenous organizations and communities are looking for/need and collaborate to develop them.
  - c. Explore ways in which information about the Commission can be packaged and presented in Indigenous languages or on platforms heavily used by Indigenous communities (social media, Indigenous media outlets, etc.).
  - d. Explore tailored information/education workshops for Indigenous organizations who can act as "community navigators" for their client base.
  - e. Engage in outreach initiatives that allow human rights information to be shared in a less formal, culturally appropriate venue (community events, cultural events, and public venues).
13. Explore ways in which Indigenous conceptions of collective rights can be incorporated into human rights education materials, laws, policies, and enforcement.
14. Improve trust between the Commission and Indigenous communities through strategic partnerships.
  - a. Identify opportunities to partner with and/or support Indigenous organizations who are working on overlapping or complementary initiatives.
  - b. Where possible, work collaboratively with Indigenous-led initiatives that address racism, discrimination, or human rights issues.
15. Promote ongoing dialogue about Indigenous Peoples' human rights and *UNDRIP* implementation and amplify Indigenous voices and human rights concerns in this regard.
16. Support the sharing of organizational best practices respecting protection and advancement of Indigenous Peoples' human rights.

