

POSITION STATEMENT ON THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR MIDWIFERY IN CANADA

RATIONALE

Midwives are an essential health profession and are needed to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.¹ The *State of the World's Midwifery* report has highlighted the critical shortage of midwives in Canada and globally.¹ Midwives are not fully integrated into health systems in Canada,^{2, 3} and it is estimated that an additional 9,000 midwives are needed in Canada by 2030 to meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of communities.^{1, 4} Recent global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated that even strong health systems are at risk of quickly becoming overburdened, severely impacting the supply, distribution, and overall wellness of the health workforce in Canada.⁵ Within sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) many indicators have worsened or even reversed as a result of the impacts of COVID-19, climate change, war, and powerful political movements around the world.⁶⁻⁸

The International Confederation of Midwives has outlined the principles necessary to create an enabling environment for midwives and generated recommendations for decision-makers.⁹ This position statement describes the principles of an enabling environment for midwives in Canada. A reconciliation-focused, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and human rights approach underpins the principles outlined below.

PRINCIPLES

The following principles are intended to support the enabling environment for midwifery in Canada.¹⁰⁻²⁶

1. Equity

- Midwives and clients practice and receive care that is free from systemic gender biases and other intersecting forms of oppression.
- Midwives and clients are respected and free from social, physical, and psychological harm.
- Learners of midwifery have access to education pathways, including Indigenous midwifery education.
- All people, including those living in Indigenous, remote, and rural communities, have access to culturally safe care led by midwives who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour (BIPOC).

2. Infrastructure

- Midwives have opportunities for career advancement and to access the critical resources needed to support their health and wellbeing, which includes collectively addressing burnout, one of the many systemic factors impacting the sustainability of midwifery.

- Midwifery associations have the capacity to provide members with malpractice insurance and health benefits, negotiate compensation and working conditions, and strengthen the profession across political, health, and education systems.

3. Professional status and agency

- Midwives have professional autonomy including self-regulation and flexible practice arrangements.
- Midwives have an optimized scope of practice.
- Midwives practice within the values of midwifery, including choice of birthplace, continuity of care and work in collaborative organizational environments.
- BIPOC midwives are respectfully engaged and represented.
- Midwifery regulation and practice opportunities are inclusive of all people trained in midwifery (e.g., Indigenous apprenticeship, international, or other).
- Midwives have opportunities for continuous professional development including equity and social justice education and training.
- Midwives are adequately compensated within pay policies and practices free from discrimination.

4. System-level integration

- Midwives provide midwife-led models of care, have optimized scope, and senior leadership positions that integrate the profession into health, regulatory, and education systems and deconstruct colonial and racist policies and practices.
- Midwives have an institutional voice in sexual, reproductive health and rights (SRHR) policy conversations at the hospital, health authority, provincial and territorial, and federal levels, such as health workforce planning, which includes gendered budgeting practices.
- Midwives have opportunities for and pathways to pursue graduate education and/or research.
- Midwives are recognized as essential frontline health workers and primary care providers that respond to health crises such as the COVID-19 global pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building the enabling environment for midwifery in Canada requires the following actions.

- 1) Understanding the barriers and enablers to the integration and sustainability of the profession, which considers midwives' and clients' needs, values, and preferences to inform policy and practice.
- 2) Supporting leaders to identify and deconstruct colonial, gendered, and racist policies and practices in midwifery, and the broader health system.

- 3) Responsive decision-makers who recognize the external forces outside of midwifery that impact the profession in individual and collective ways (i.e., COVID-19).
- 4) Funding activities that support the development of the organizational and technical capacity of midwifery associations.
- 5) Creating appropriate governance, financial and delivery arrangements within health systems in Canada, ultimately leading to a sustainable midwifery workforce.

CASE STUDIES

Narrowing gender pay gaps for midwives in Ontario

The gender pay gap is one contributing factor to the oppression and sustainability of the profession. Midwives in Ontario have been lobbying for pay equity for 20 years. In 2013, the Association of Ontario Midwives (AOM), on behalf of its members, filed an application with the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (HRTO) claiming the Ministry of Health had persistently set a discriminatory compensation structure for midwives.²⁷ In a landmark decision in 2020, the HRTO found a gender pay gap for midwives. While the Ontario government opposed the decision, two upper courts of Ontario ruled in favour of midwives. This legal win for midwives in Ontario has set a critical precedent with potential far-reaching implications for midwifery associations across Canada.²⁷ The AOM is currently advocating for the full implementation of the HRTO remedial orders including infrastructure that will protect against discriminatory pay in future negotiations.

Building stronger midwifery associations across Canada

Stable core funding along with organizational and technical capacity support is a catalyst for midwifery associations, enabling their financial stability, and organizational growth, with impacts on sustainability of the profession. The Canadian Association of Midwives (CAM) has gained recognition for its approach to capacity building of midwifery associations around the world. CAM's new 5-year theory of change includes association strengthening as a pillar to achieving "equitable access to excellent sexual, reproductive, and newborn midwifery services for everyone".²⁸ CAM's newly appointed Coordinator of Association Strengthening is working closely with CAM member associations and national midwife networks to collaborate on capacity building. CAM activities aim for "stronger internal structures, organizational effectiveness, and increased financial capacity" which ultimately enables associations to address sustainability with their members and across jurisdictions.²⁸

Advocating for access to Inuit midwifery services in Nunavut

Racist and colonialism systems severely impact the sustainability of the profession because it oppresses BIPOC midwives and impacts people and communities' access to culturally safe midwife-led care.¹³ The only two Inuit midwives in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, Cas Connelly, and Rachel Jones, were forced to leave their work after years of mistreatment, racism, and a lack of support. Inuit people in the Kivalliq region do not have access to sexual and reproductive care in Inuktitut nor centered in their culture and are forced to leave their communities to give birth. Cas and Rachel along with the residents of Rankin Inlet initiated a petition to be presented to the parliament of Canada, by the Honourable MP Lori Idlout of Nunavut.²⁹ Recently, a joint statement from the National Council of Indigenous Midwives (NCIM) and Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, calls on governments to recognize the leadership of Inuit midwives and to urgently fund and support the integration of traditional Inuit midwifery practice. They emphasize the responsibility

of communities at large to support, advocate and center the work of Indigenous midwives and the return of services to Rankin Inlet.³⁰ Early in 2023, Pauktuutit hosted a forum to address the right to access to traditional Inuit midwifery. The forum was attended by hundreds, beginning a critical step to informing the next steps to this effort.

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