

# Creating Culturally-Safe Spaces and Care for Inuit Women and Their Families

A Resource Guide for Service Providers

## Did you know this about Inuit?<sup>1</sup>

- 65,000 in Canada
- 27 percent live outside Inuit Nunangat
- 51 percent are under 25 years of age
- Are the fastest growing population in Canada
- Inuit means people, Inuk is one person
- Inuktitut has over 15 dialects and is written in Inuktitut syllabics

As a service provider, understanding the lived experience of Inuit women clients is key to providing culturally-competent quality care.

## Why do Inuit women move south?

Reasons for relocating are often linked to the impacts of colonization.

### Pull Factors

- Higher education
- Employment
- Family unity and reunification

### Push Factors

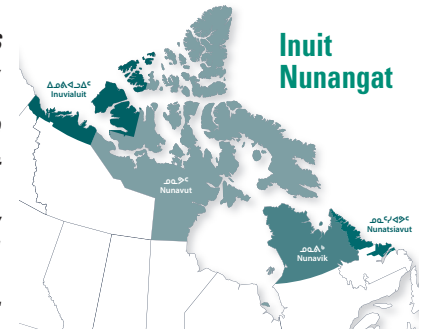
- Lack of services
- High cost of living
- Health care
- Overcrowded, inadequate, or unaffordable housing

## Colonization

Inuit have a 5,000-year history of distinct worldview and beliefs yet recently have endured rapid acculturation. Between the 1920s and 1990s, Canada's federal government exercised control with policies that:

- led to the loss of individual/collective autonomy, and intergenerational trauma;
- disrupted a thousands-year-old nomadic culture by forced relocation to the high Arctic and permanent settlements;
- removed children from their families and communities to residential schools;
- led to forced and coerced medical treatment, sudden removal, relocation and multi-year institutionalization for tuberculosis (TB) treatment;
- led to the killing of sled dogs — the sole land transportation, vital for hunting, protection and the Inuit way of life; and
- created mistrust of non-Inuit including health/social service providers, public institutions (schools, police, government), and others with perceived power.

**Inuit Nunangat means 'Inuit Homeland' and includes the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut, and Nunavut.**

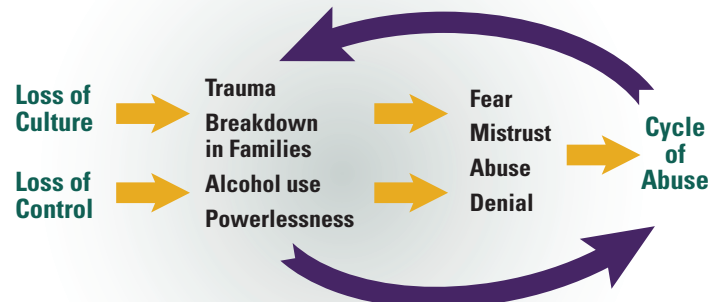


## Contemporary realities — Social and economic inequalities<sup>2</sup>

- **Number of physicians per person**
  - 30 per 100,000 in Nunavut
  - 119 per 100,000 in urban centres
- **Median income across Inuit Nunangat**
  - \$23,485 for Inuit
  - \$92,011 for non-Inuit
- **Percentage of households without enough food**
  - 70 per cent of Inuit in Nunavut
  - 8 per cent in the rest of Canada
- **Overcrowded homes in Inuit Nunangat**
  - 52 per cent of Inuit
  - 9 per cent of non-Inuit

These realities depict the continuing effects of colonization, including impacts on health, such as TB with a rate 300 times higher among Inuit vs the Canadian born non-indigenous population. Learn about TB, and the Inuit Tuberculosis Elimination Framework.<sup>3</sup>

## Root causes of abuse



1 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2018), *Inuit Statistical Profile 2018*  
 2 [https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Social\\_Inequity\\_Infographic\\_English.pdf](https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Social_Inequity_Infographic_English.pdf)  
 3 <https://www.itk.ca/inuittberelminationframework/>  
 4 Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (2006), National Strategy to Prevent Abuse in Inuit Communities

## Safety and violence

Inuit women who move south may be seeking safety for themselves and their children. Intimate partner violence (IPV) rates in Inuit Nunangat are 14 times the national average, yet only 15 women's shelters service 51 communities across Inuit Nunangat, most of which are fly-in. However, life in urban centers may also present risks and challenges for Inuit women and their families

***Leaving home is socially and financially costly. A flight south often exceeds \$2,000/person.***

## Moving south

- **Social norms**
  - Inuit smile when greeting, and it is customary to share food and visit without planning or knocking.
  - Respecting individual decision-making is deeply valued.
- **New surroundings**
  - City life may be disorienting (public transit, trees, hospitals, skyscrapers).
  - Language barriers are challenging for those who do not speak English.
- **Loss of social network**
  - Without family and friends nearby, Inuit women may feel isolated.
- **Access to housing**
  - Securing housing is often challenging. Your clients may not have a permanent home.<sup>5</sup>
- **New challenges**
  - Inuit women may experience negative assumptions, racism, or be targeted for abuse and violence.<sup>6</sup>
  - Relocating is complex, with competing priorities, so it is important to be mindful, patient and compassionate.

### **Inuit principles — Values that guide, shape and strengthen Inuit identity**

- Respecting people, and the environment
- Fostering inclusion, and being of service
- Consensus decision-making
- Empowerment and action-based learning
- Working for the common good
- Being innovative and resourceful

## Inuit communication styles

Create a safe space by becoming aware of how Inuit communicate.

- **Be attentive to non-verbal cues**
  - Raising of eyebrows means *yes*.
  - Scrunching of the nose means *no*.
- **Attentive listening**
  - Show you are listening and respectful by being patient — allow for silence before expecting or giving a response.
- **Observation and reflection**
  - Not indicating an acknowledgement may reveal reflection, not a lack of understanding.
  - Be mindful Inuit may be reluctant to ask questions and may not reveal pain or other symptoms.
- **Effective information sharing**
  - Inuit hold a holistic world view, so explaining purpose and outcomes is important.
  - Speak in clear, plain language.
  - Ask questions like, "Is this helpful?," "Does this make sense?," and "Do you have any questions?"
    - When providing medication information, explain side effects, how to prevent them, the purpose of the medication, expected outcomes, and the importance of taking all of it.
- **Create welcoming spaces by learning Inuktitut words**
  - Thank you: **nakurmiik** (nah-koor-meeek) or **qujannamiik** (khoo'-yan'-nah-meeek)
  - You're welcome: **ilaali** (ee-laah-lee)
  - Welcome: **tungasugit** (too-nga-soo-git)



## What next?

Continue to develop your cultural awareness and competency by visiting these websites.

- **Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada:** [www.pauktuutit.ca](http://www.pauktuutit.ca)
- **Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami:** [www.itk.ca](http://www.itk.ca)

<sup>5</sup> Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (2006), National Strategy to Prevent Abuse in Inuit Communities

<sup>6</sup> Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (2017), *Understanding the Needs of Urban Inuit Women, Fact Sheets*