

Indigenous relations

Indigenous Peoples in Winnipeg continue to live, govern, and relate through systems of law, responsibility, and kinship that existed long before the City of Winnipeg itself. These systems are not symbolic; they are lived, practiced, and carried forward through families, communities, and Nations every day. Within Indigenous governance, responsibility is foundational: to protect the people, to speak truth, and to hold systems accountable when they fail to uphold their obligations.

This chapter is written with that responsibility in mind and reflects lived experience alongside community-informed knowledge gathered through interviews with Indigenous community members, service providers, and leaders. It also reflects direct feedback from community voices who continue to assert that Indigenous participation must not be selective, symbolic, or occasional; it must be continuous, accountable, and rooted in relationships.

Winnipeg has one of the largest urban Indigenous populations in Canada. This reality reflects both the strength and resilience of Indigenous communities, as well as the ongoing impacts of colonial policies that have displaced people from their lands into urban centers. The City of Winnipeg, therefore, holds a direct responsibility in shaping the conditions Indigenous peoples experience daily. Municipal decisions, particularly those related to housing, policing, infrastructure, community investment, environmental planning, and economic development, either reinforce inequities or contribute to meaningful change.



Exterior of Wii Chiiwaakanak / Alanna Yuen

From symbolic reconciliation to structural change

This chapter was written based on interviews with Indigenous community leaders in Winnipeg. Findings from community interviews consistently indicate that, while the City of Winnipeg has taken visible steps toward reconciliation, a persistent gap remains between symbolic action and structural change. Initiatives such as land acknowledgements, commemorative events, renaming efforts, and advisory tables signal awareness, but they have not consistently translated into measurable improvements in the daily realities of Indigenous peoples. These actions, while important, cannot substitute for structural transformation.

Indigenous peoples remain significantly overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness and continue to face disproportionate rates of poverty, food insecurity, and involvement in the justice systems. These outcomes are not incidental; they are directly connected to policy decisions, funding priorities, and governance structures that have yet to shift meaningfully. Reconciliation, in this context, is a structural obligation. It must be reflected in municipal priorities, budget allocations, and measurable outcomes. When reconciliation remains symbolic, it actively

reinforces the inequities it claims to address. The absence of structural change is not neutral; it perpetuates harm.

To address this, the City should establish mandatory reporting, including a Reconciliation Impact Framework across all municipal departments, and require that all budget decisions demonstrate measurable impacts on Indigenous peoples, supported by annual public reporting and accountability benchmarks.

Interconnected systems of inequity: Housing, safety, and well-being

The challenges identified are not isolated issues but interconnected systems of inequity reinforced through municipal policy and practice. Housing is a foundational determinant of well-being. The absence of safe, stable housing increases vulnerability to violence, health challenges, and system involvement. For Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, this vulnerability is intensified within the ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The City's reliance on enforcement-based approaches to safety has not reduced the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in policing systems. When safety is defined primarily through enforcement, it overlooks the underlying conditions that produce harm, poverty, trauma, and lack of access to stable housing and supports. Community perspectives emphasize that safety must be understood more broadly. True safety includes access to housing, culturally grounded supports, community connection, prevention-based services, family strengthening, and culturally safe health and wellness supports.

Food insecurity reflects these same interconnected patterns. In many Winnipeg neighbourhoods, particularly in the North End, access to affordable and culturally appropriate food remains limited. Addressing this requires coordinated, long-term solutions, including local food initiatives, urban agriculture, and land-based practices. These realities are interconnected: housing instability intensifies poverty, poverty restricts food access, and both increase exposure to policing and system involvement. A systems-based approach is required: one that prioritizes prevention, long-term investment, and community well-being rather than reactive, short-term responses.

The City must act on its responsibilities to MMIWGTS+ in every department, including waste collection. Following recommendations

from a search feasibility study, the Manitoba government announced it is seeking to install GPS and enhanced video surveillance on garbage trucks and at landfill entrances/exits.¹

Investing in Indigenous-led solutions

Interviews consistently highlight that effective solutions already exist within Indigenous communities. Indigenous-led housing initiatives, community safety models, cultural programming, employment pathways, family support systems, and land-based approaches are producing meaningful outcomes. However, these initiatives remain underfunded, short-term, and constrained by restrictive funding structures.

Land-based programming was identified as essential. These programs support identity, healing, youth engagement, employment readiness, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Despite their demonstrated impact, they are often treated as secondary rather than core infrastructure within municipal funding frameworks.

Indigenous-led housing models integrate cultural safety, community governance, and wraparound supports, addressing broader determinants of well-being beyond shelter alone. These models demonstrate that culturally grounded approaches produce stronger, more sustainable outcomes.

This requires a shift from short-term project funding toward sustained, multi-year investments that recognize Indigenous-led initiatives as core municipal infrastructure. This includes establishing dedicated funding streams, reallocating portions of existing municipal budgets toward prevention-based approaches, and ensuring that Indigenous-led organizations have the stability required to plan, grow, and deliver long-term outcomes. The AMB commits to allocate one per cent of the City's operating budget, totalling \$14.9 million, to support Indigenous-led organizations through a new, dedicated, and multi-year Indigenous Community Grants Fund. This works to ensure the vital contributions of Indigenous-led organizations are recognized and sustained.

Budget decisions must explicitly align with Indigenous priorities identified at the community level, including housing, employment, family strengthening, and health and wellness. Without this alignment, investments risk being fragmented, ineffective, or disconnected from lived realities. Funding must also support land-based education,

cultural revitalization, and youth programming as essential, not optional, components of community well-being.

Indigenous-led governance and accountability

A consistent theme across interviews is the need to move beyond consultation toward Indigenous-led governance and decision-making authority. Current engagement processes often position Indigenous communities as stakeholders rather than rights holders. Indigenous voices are still too often brought in after decisions have already been shaped. This cannot continue. Participation must be ongoing and present at every stage of decision-making, including budget development, policy design, implementation, and evaluation. This includes actively seeking community feedback prior to publication and ensuring that Indigenous voices are accurately and respectfully reflected.

Reconciliation requires a redistribution of power. This includes embedding Indigenous leadership within municipal structures, establishing formalized roles in decision-making processes, and ensuring Indigenous authority is reflected not only in consultation but in final decisions. The City of Winnipeg must also strengthen partnerships with Indigenous leadership across sectors, including housing, health, education, and environmental planning. Indigenous participation must be embedded in climate action strategies, green space development, and land-use planning to ensure that decisions reflect Indigenous knowledge systems and relationships to land.

Accountability remains a significant gap. While commitments have been made, there is limited transparency regarding how Indigenous advisory input shapes policy or how outcomes are measured. The City of Winnipeg must report on its work with Indigenous peoples in a clear and public way. This must include the Indigenous Reconciliation Accountability Framework with annual public reporting tied directly to budget allocations, clear, publicly reported benchmarks for progress, a public dashboard, measurable outcomes linked to Indigenous priorities, and mechanisms for Indigenous-led oversight and evaluation. Accountability must also include consequences. Where commitments are not met, there must be clear processes to identify gaps, respond to failures, and realign actions with stated priorities. Without this, accountability remains symbolic rather than operational.

From commitment to implementation

The path forward is not uncertain. Indigenous communities have consistently identified what is needed: stable housing, community-based approaches to safety, equitable access to food and services, employment opportunities, family strengthening, and sustained investment in cultural and land-based programming. These solutions already exist. What remains is implementation. Reconciliation is not a performance. It is not a statement, a moment, or a role to step into when the room is watching. It is a responsibility. It is a relationship. It is how decisions are made when no one is watching.

A continued failure to act in alignment with these responsibilities will not maintain the status quo; it will deepen inequities, widen gaps in outcomes, and further erode trust between Indigenous communities and municipal systems. The cost of inaction is already visible. The responsibility now is to interrupt that pattern through decisions that are intentional, accountable, and sustained over time. Indigenous knowledge systems recognize accountability through action. Authenticity is not determined by what is said, but by how responsibility is carried: consistently, over time, and in ways that are visible in the lived realities of communities.

Actions

- **The AMB will** establish an arms-length Indigenous Reconciliation Accountability Framework and advisory body. This will include three FTE staff to establish and manage the framework alongside funding for an Indigenous-led Advisory Council: \$400,000.
- **The AMB will** provide funding for annual public reporting on reconciliation framework via a public event and feast: \$20,000.
- **The AMB will** fund Indigenous-led housing development. The Housing Chapter outlines a range of funds, totalling \$14.5 million per year, dedicated to funding the creation of indigenous, social, and non-profit housing across Winnipeg.
- **The AMB will** direct resources toward Indigenous-led outreach, crisis response, and harm reduction (specific allocations made in Safety chapter).

- **The AMB will** fund the implementation of monitoring tools in municipal waste systems (GPS tracking, cameras, response protocols) to enhance safety and accountability related to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, starting by modifying waste disposal contracts to have a pilot on 20 trucks in higher-risk areas. Funding will include \$40,000 in initial capital (cameras, software) and \$40,000 for operating costs.
- **The AMB will** develop an Indigenous Urban Food Security Initiative supporting community-led food systems, urban agriculture, and culturally appropriate food access: \$1 million for four sites via Indigenous-led organizations.
- **The AMB will** fund a multi-year dedicated Indigenous Community Grants Fund for stable operational funding for Indigenous-led organizations at \$14.9 million per year.
- **The AMB will** establish an Indigenous Land-Based Education and Green Space Fund supporting Elders, Knowledge Keepers, transportation, and programming with \$1 million per year with Indigenous-led organizations.

Notes

¹ Sanders, Carol. (2024). "Province eyes GPS tracking of garbage trucks in wake of slayings." *Winnipeg Free Press*. September 4, 2024. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/09/04/province-eyes-gps-tracking-of-garbage-trucks>