

# EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



Native Women's  
Association of Canada

L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

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## EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- Indigenous communities often face unique challenges and require innovative planning to respond to disaster situations such as wildfires, avalanches, and chemical leaks. Like the fly-in communities in the North, many are in remote areas that may not be accessible by conventional transportation, especially if these areas are impacted by weather related emergencies.<sup>1</sup>
- Others may be located a significant distance away from emergency services such as hospitals and shelters. Even when living in major cities, Indigenous women are uniquely vulnerable to the after-effects of disasters, such as family separation and relocation.<sup>2</sup> Standard emergency management plans may not be focused on anticipating these vulnerabilities.
- All of which underscores the necessity of actively engaging with Indigenous women, their families, and their communities in the prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery stages of emergency management.

## Emergency Management Priorities for Indigenous Women

- Building capacity and resources within Indigenous communities to establish emergency plans that have elements of cultural specificity and community ownership. Indigenous communities must have the agency to determine their own protocols and best practices.
- Recognizing the role of Indigenous women as caretakers and providing them the necessary supports to care for their families and communities if they are displaced and helping them to rebuild after returning to their homes.
- Recognizing that disasters create situations of heightened stress, incredible anxiety, panic, and possible re-traumatization. Services that are responsive to the physical, emotional, and cultural needs of Indigenous women must be included in disaster planning.<sup>3</sup>
- Acknowledging the potential for increased gender-based and domestic violence in the wake of a disaster event. Compounding this issue is the fact that police, reporting services, crisis centres, and medical facilities are likely to be unavailable to respond to reports of sexual violence.<sup>4</sup>
- Ensuring the infrastructure and necessary supports to implement an emergency search and rescue plan for missing Indigenous women.

**TO LEARN MORE, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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## Search and Rescue Recommendations – MMIW<sup>5</sup>

- Effective communication and public alerting systems between communities.
- Affordable transportation between remote communities and city centers to lessen the necessity of hitchhiking.
- Established timelines and protocols for police when Indigenous women are reported missing.
- Ongoing communication between the families of missing women and police.
- Trauma-informed and culturally-appropriate training for first responders.

### Works Cited

1 Orkin, A., VanderBurgh, D., Born, K., Webster, M., Strickland, S., & Beardy, J. (2012). Where there is no paramedic: The Sachigo Lake wilderness emergency response education initiative. *PLOS Medicine*, 9(10).

2 Health Canada. (1992). *Personal services: Psychosocial planning for disasters*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of National Health and Welfare.

3 Parkinson, D. (2011). *Gender, disaster, and violence literature review*. Retrieved from: <http://www.whealth.com.au/documents/environmentaljustice/women-disaster-violence-lit-review.pdf>.

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5 Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, Prince George Native Friendship Centre, & Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association. (2006). *Highway of tears symposium recommendations report*. Retrieved from: <http://highwayoftears.org/resources/documents-and-reports>.

6 Federal Office for Civil Protection. (2010). *Social vulnerability to disasters*. Zurich: Corinne Bara.

## Social Vulnerability to Disaster<sup>6</sup>

The impacts of emergencies are not equal for all people. Disaster losses “are reflections of human vulnerabilities that arise from physical, social, economic, and political conditions and inequalities.”

Conditions of social and economic disadvantage directly impact the ability of individuals and communities to respond to and recover from disasters. Recognizing the social vulnerabilities to disasters and including high-risk populations in emergency management and response plans ensures the safety of entire communities.

Groups that may be disproportionately at risk include women, children, Elders, those living in poverty, people who are homeless or in transitional housing, trans and Two-Spirited folks, those with a cognitive disability or physical impairment, and others who may be at risk due to social isolation.

Increasing financial supports to Indigenous communities to invest in clean water, stable housing, reliable transportation, disaster related insurance, communication technologies, and other protective measures may limit the destructive effects of disaster and emergency situations. Addressing social vulnerabilities as part of the disaster prevention and response plans requires active engagement with the issue of individual and collective inequality.