

# Empowering First Nations Police Governance

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*Opportunities Through Challenges*  
*February 18-19, 2026*



# Table of Contents

|                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary .....                                | 3  |
| Overview and Background .....                          | 7  |
| Starting a First Nations Police Service .....          | 10 |
| Health and Wellness .....                              | 14 |
| Mental Health Support for First Responders .....       | 17 |
| Relationships with Leadership .....                    | 20 |
| Provincial Factors .....                               | 24 |
| First Nations and Inuit Policing Program Funding ..... | 29 |
| Municipal and Urban Policing .....                     | 34 |
| Building Relationships with First Nations .....        | 39 |
| Future Directions .....                                | 46 |
| References and Supporting Sources .....                | 52 |

## Executive Summary

The report brings forward the First Nations Police Governance Council's (FNPGC) collective messages, concerns, opportunities, and shared responsibilities identified through First Nations Police Governance Council gatherings focused on the future of First Nations policing and police governance in Canada. First Nations Police Governance is an important matter which requires awareness from Public Safety Canada, First Nations communities, First Nations police governance boards and commissions, police boards and commissions, Chiefs and Councils, police leaders, public safety partners, and communities with a vested interest in policing and police governance. The report affirms that public safety is a collective responsibility and that First Nations policing must be understood as a community-centred, culturally grounded, rights-based, and essential public safety function.

Across the report, participants describe First Nations police governance as more than an administrative requirement. Governance is the place where community voice, civilian oversight, cultural authority, strategic planning, accountability, and operational independence meet. Strong boards, commissions, police authorities, and similar governance bodies help ensure that policing remains connected to the people it serves while also protecting the Chief of Police from inappropriate political direction. When properly trained and resourced, governance bodies can strengthen community confidence, support leadership, improve relationships with funding partners, and help services move from reactive policing toward prevention, wellness, and long-term safety planning.

FNPGC, First Nations Policing Services, and our policing partners emphasize that First Nations policing is still too often treated as a temporary program rather than an essential service. Public Safety Canada's First Nations and Inuit Policing Program (FNIPP) operates through cost-shared arrangements involving Canada and provinces or territories, including self-administered police services, enhanced policing agreements, community safety officer models, and RCMP Community Tripartite Agreements. While this framework has supported important services, participants repeatedly identified instability created by short-term agreements, delayed negotiations, restrictive eligible expenses, provincial variation, staffing shortages, infrastructure gaps, limited access to specialized units, heavy reporting requirements, and inequitable resourcing. These structural issues affect community safety directly.

The 2024 Auditor General of Canada report on the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program reinforces many of the concerns raised in FNPGC gatherings. The audit found that Public Safety Canada did not work in partnership with First Nations communities to provide equitable access to policing services tailored to First Nation's needs, that program funds went unspent despite continuing community safety needs, that the RCMP did not consistently meet Community Tripartite Agreement requirements, and that both Public Safety Canada and the RCMP lacked sufficient information to determine whether agreements and program objectives were being met. These findings underline the need for stronger partnership, clearer accountability, improved data, and more reliable funding mechanisms.

## Key Findings

1. First Nations policing is a proven and trusted model of public safety when it is rooted in community relationships, culture, language, ceremony, local accountability, and trauma-informed practice.
2. Governance bodies are essential institutions that require dedicated training, administrative support, policy tools, legal clarity, and stable funding to exercise effective civilian oversight.
3. Current program-based funding structures do not consistently support the operational realities of policing, including recruitment, retention, wage and pension parity, dispatch, facilities, technology, specialized capacity, and officer wellness.
4. Provincial legislation and differing policing acts create uneven recognition, powers, standards, complaint processes, and supports for First Nations police services and governance bodies across Canada.
5. Mental health and wellness supports for officers, civilian staff, dispatchers, leaders, and families must be treated as core operational readiness requirements, not optional benefits.
6. Urban and municipal policing must be included in First Nations police governance conversations because First Nations, Inuit, and Indigenous people live, work, study, access services, and move across reserve, rural, northern, remote, and urban spaces.
7. Reconciliation in policing requires measurable change: advisory structures, Indigenous-led policy input, trauma-informed and anti-racism training, shared accountability, culturally safe service delivery, and sustained follow-through.

## Implications

Public Safety Canada: FNP GC calls for a renewed relationship with First Nations grounded in partnership, equity, transparency, and accountability. Public Safety Canada is encouraged to move beyond program administration toward recognition of First Nations policing as an essential service, supported by stable multi-year or permanent funding, simplified reporting, equitable allocation methods, timely disbursement, culturally responsive program design, and shared evaluation measures developed with First Nations communities and governance bodies.

**First Nations communities:** The report affirms that policing must remain accountable to the people it serves. Communities should be supported to define their own public safety priorities, participate in governance development, contribute to cultural protocols, identify service gaps, and help shape expectations for prevention, response, wellness, communication, and accountability. Community voice should be present before, during, and after policing decisions are made.

**First Nations police governance boards and commissions:** This report positions governance bodies as anchors of accountability. Boards and commissions should prioritize role clarity, governance training, conflict-of-interest rules, policy development, strategic planning, financial literacy, community engagement, cultural leadership, performance oversight, and respectful working relationships with Chiefs of Police, elected leadership, administration, and funding partners.

**Police boards and commissions outside First Nations communities:** The report highlights the importance of learning from First Nations policing models and strengthening relationships with Indigenous governments, organizations, elders, knowledge keepers, and community members. Municipal and regional police governance bodies have a responsibility to ensure that Indigenous people receive culturally informed, trauma-informed, humane, and accountable policing in urban and non-reserve settings.

**Chiefs and Councils:** The report recognizes the vital role of elected leadership in establishing, appointing, and supporting governance bodies while respecting the operational independence of the police service. Chiefs and Councils can strengthen policing by ensuring community mandate, supporting proper appointments, advocating for equitable funding, maintaining transparency with citizens, and helping governance structures remain steady through elections and leadership transitions.

## Next Step Actions

1. Recognize First Nations policing as an essential service and structural public safety guarantee, rather than a discretionary program or temporary enhancement.
2. Establish stable, equitable, and flexible funding arrangements that support long-term planning, wage and pension parity, training, infrastructure, dispatch, communications, technology, specialized response, and wellness.
3. Invest directly in governance capacity so boards, commissions, and police authorities have the training, administrative support, policy frameworks, and legal clarity required to provide effective civilian oversight.
4. Develop national and regional First Nations police governance networks to share tools, training, data practices, policies, lessons learned, and advocacy strategies.

5. Strengthen federal, provincial, territorial, and First Nations partnership tables so funding, legislation, standards, and accountability are negotiated with communities rather than imposed on them.
6. Build trauma-informed, healing-informed, and culturally grounded policing practices into daily operations, training, supervision, performance expectations, and community engagement.
7. Create integrated public safety partnerships across First Nations, municipal, provincial, federal, health, housing, education, justice, and social service systems so community members are not lost between jurisdictions.
8. Improve data collection and reporting in ways that are ethical, de-identified where appropriate, governed by First Nations principles, and used to support service improvement, funding advocacy, and community accountability.

Our message in this report is clear: First Nations policing works when it is governed by community, grounded in culture, supported by strong relationships, and resourced as an essential public safety infrastructure. The challenges identified are substantial, but they are not insurmountable. With sustained commitment from Public Safety Canada, provinces and territories, First Nations leadership, governance bodies, police leaders, and community partners, First Nations policing can move from cycles of uncertainty toward a future defined by stability, self-determination, officer wellness, cultural strength, and measurable improvements in safety and trust. The safety of the people remains a collective responsibility; the next step is ensuring that the systems supporting that responsibility are equally collective, accountable, and enduring.

## Overview

First Nations have understood and agreed that the “safety of a people is a collective responsibility”. This principle is still alive and practiced in First Nations communities where a shared cultural understanding necessitates a collaborative endeavor to ensure the safety and welfare of the community. In the contemporary framework of law enforcement service provision, we depend on policing agencies to uphold order and security for the “collective”. These services are directed by a Police Chief responsible for supervising multiple levels and aspects of the police service. First Nations Leadership are needed for sustaining understanding on the implementation and impact of police services within the community. The community interest must be integrated into the policing framework, as those who will be impacted by policing service are members of the community. This necessitates oversight, which involves responsible individuals supervising service provision while ensuring a space of accountability for leadership and the police chief managing the implementation of policing services. This is the point at which governance through boards and commissions becomes essential for the maintenance of an accountable policing system and the consistent provision of services. Police Governance can significantly influence communities when properly supported, implemented, and utilized. First Nations peoples have always upheld governance frameworks that ensured the responsible provision of policing services and public safety systems, while also ensuring that community issues were acknowledged and understood to achieve positive impacts from police outcomes. The First Nations Police Governance Council (FNPGC) endeavours to link police governance leaders throughout Turtle Island (Canada) to exchange knowledge and bolster each First Nations Police service and governance objectives. We have convened on two occasions for two significant conferences to deliberate on the themes of “Challenges” and “Opportunities”. This report seeks to clarify feedback, insights, and the imperative to collect and disseminate discussions that may be employed to solidify the importance of First Nations Police Governance.

## Background

Police governance is not a new concept for our First Nations communities. The historical colonial harm and trauma endured during contact and the subsequent formation of the country we now know as Canada vanquished an opportunity for First Nations and indigenous ways of knowing and being to be recorded and preserved. Prior to contact First Nations and Indigenous communities would have had to practice what we know as “governance” today. It is important to acknowledge and reflect on historical harms and traumas so we may correct and encourage practices that could provide substantial benefits today. As we move forward, it may be prudent that we look at First Nations history and past practices to reflect on how we established systems that met our needs as First Nations people and determine how we may implement those practices and build those systems today. I have often been told to look back, not forward, as we can't know the future, but we can learn from the past. Some elders and wisdom holders may have a more clarified ability to explain how First Nations governance systems worked and how they affected community well-being. I look forward to those conversations' continuation and the positive outcomes they will have for First Nations communities.

### Rationale and importance of gathering

Police governance is required and needed; in First Nations, police governance can have positive reverberating effects on the community, which may increase confidence and trust in public safety systems. Confidence and trust may be absent due to intergenerational harm and trauma caused by colonialism. Police governance can act as the delta between the community, the service, and the community's leadership. It is important that police governance boards and commissions are comprised of civilian oversight, as these will be the responsible individuals who live, work, and participate in the community. These individuals will also be responsible for supporting service delivery and collaborating while working with leadership to clarify community concerns and address problems that may require pragmatic solutions. Governance and oversight are important and necessary to support the goals and aspirations of the Chief of police. The Chief of Police is the only employee of the commission or board. It is important to balance being admonitory and firm when building a relationship between the chair of the commission and the chief of police. It is vital to involve leadership in a board or commission, but they shouldn't be the only members. Civilian oversight also acts as a responsible mechanism that takes the potential liability away from the leadership body should challenges arise with a police service. Strategy and objectives are important and necessary, and achieving them will require a monetary investment.

The First Nations police governance gatherings have been established to facilitate comprehensive discussions on advancing the needs of First Nations police services, as well as enhancing governance requirements and capabilities. Two gatherings have been hosted to date on the Tsuut'ina Nation. Both gatherings attracted many participants, leading to impactful discussions about our respective First Nations and how we can support each other's aspirations. The gatherings included impactful discussions about our work with our respective First Nations and how we can support each other's aspirations. Conducting conversations regarding First Nations police governance and supporting the delivery of police services allows time and space to offer insight and perspective, which may allow First Nations police services to invigorate practices that better align with the needs of the community. Including ceremony and traditional practices is essential for us to remain representative of the community we serve. There is a wealth of knowledge among First Nations police service members and governance professionals. This report has been developed to enhance the understanding of conference 2026 while sharing perspective on the theme: opportunities through challenges. This report, along with its contributors who were all members of our panels and presentations, aims to provide perspective and enlightenment by sharing impactful and resonant ways to move forward, as well as the rationale for the return on investment in First Nations policing and governance systems.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## First Nations Policing Panel — Police Governance Needs On First Nations: What It Takes To Start A First Nations Police Service

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Moderator: Teddy Manywounds FNPGC Chair, CAPG Board member

Panellists: Grant Buckskin — Chief, Blood Tribe Police Service

Deborah Doss-Cody — Chief, St'at'imc Tribal Police Service

Jolene Dione — Director, Indigenous Police Policy, Public Safety Canada

### Discussion context and rationale

First Nations police governance begins from the principle that community safety is a collective responsibility. A police service cannot be successfully established by funding alone, nor by simply hiring officers or appointing a Chief of Police. It requires a community-supported governance structure that can represent the interests of the Nation, provide civilian oversight, protect the operational independence of the police service, and maintain accountable relationships with leadership, community members, provincial partners, and Canada.

Under the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program, First Nations policing is generally supported through a tripartite funding model involving the First Nation, the province or territory, and the federal government. Public Safety Canada describes FNIPP funding as cost-shared at 52 percent federal and 48 percent provincial or territorial, with agreements supporting First Nations and Inuit police services, enhanced policing arrangements, community safety officer models, and related policing initiatives. This funding relationship is important, but it must be understood as more than a financial arrangement: it is also a relationship of accountability, negotiation, shared responsibility, and recognition of First Nations authority to define public safety needs in ways that reflect community realities, culture, languages, trauma histories, and local priorities.

Before a First Nations police service hires a Chief of Police, the Nation should first establish a civilian governance body, such as a police board, commission, authority, or similar oversight structure. This body becomes the anchor for accountability. Its role is to set board direction, approve policy, support strategic planning, oversee the Chief of Police, monitor service performance, ensure cultural alignment, and act as a bridge between the police service, Chief and Council, senior administration, funding partners, and the community. The governance body should not manage daily police operations or interfere in investigations; rather, it should ensure that the police service is accountable, properly supported, community-informed, and operating within its mandate.

The process of building this governance body should be deliberate and community driven. Chiefs and Councils, together with Chief Executive Officers, senior administrative executives, justice leads, and community representatives, can begin by confirming the Nation's policing vision and mandate. They can then develop terms of reference, appointment criteria, conflict-of-interest rules, training expectations, accountability requirements, and reporting relationships. Appointments should prioritize civilian oversight, community credibility, cultural knowledge, independence, good governance experience, and the ability to work respectfully with both leadership and police administration. Where appropriate, the appointment process may include nominations by Chief and Council, recommendations from administrative executives, community calls for interest, elder or knowledge keeper guidance, and formal confirmation through Band Council Resolution or another recognized Nation process.

A strong governance appointment process should also protect the board or commission from becoming purely political. Leadership has an essential role in creating and appointing the governance body, but the body must be able to provide independent civilian oversight once established. This means members should understand the difference between governance and operations, avoid directing individual police matters, keep confidential information protected, and focus on policy, planning, community priorities, budget advocacy, performance oversight, and the relationship with the Chief of Police. Training for board members is therefore essential before and after appointments are made.

The relationship under a tripartite agreement must be built on clarity and trust. The First Nation brings the community mandate, cultural direction, and local accountability. The province or territory brings policing legislation, standards, and its 48 percent funding responsibility. The federal government, through Public Safety Canada, brings the 52 percent funding share and national program responsibilities. The governance body must be able to work with all parties while ensuring the Nation's priorities remain central. This requires regular communication, transparent reporting, early engagement before funding deadlines, shared problem-solving around staffing and infrastructure, and advocacy for funding that is stable, flexible, and adequate for the realities of First Nations policing.

Once the governance body is established, trained, and recognized, it can begin the process of recruiting and hiring a Chief of Police. At that stage, the board or commission should be able to define the Chief's role, set expectations, approve hiring processes, establish performance review tools, and ensure the Chief is supported but also accountable. This sequence matters: if a Chief is hired before the governance body exists, the service may lack proper civilian oversight, role clarity, and community accountability. If governance is established first, the Chief enters into a clearer relationship where leadership, administration, the board or commission, and the police service each understand their responsibilities.

### **Key themes and takeaways:**

1. Purpose: Explore realities, challenges and requirements for establishing and sustaining First Nations police services; emphasize community-driven, culturally-grounded models.
2. Community-driven formation: Successful services begin with a clear community mandate, ceremony, leadership support and sustained relationship-building. Governance boards must be trained and resourced.
3. Funding & resources: Chronic underfunding and restrictive conditions (e.g., limits in tripartite agreements) constrain specialized units and responses to crises (e.g., fentanyl). Services often must find local, creative funding solutions and nurture relationships with provincial/federal partners.
4. Politics & systems: Policing is political both within communities and with external governments. Cultural humility, re-building trust, and acknowledging systemic harms are essential. Public Safety must work holistically and repair relationships with Indigenous organizations.
5. Cultural relevance & practices: Embedding culture (ceremony, Indigenous oaths, language, traditional names on uniforms, cultural regalia) builds trust and legitimacy. Officers from community or who respect community protocols improve outcomes (examples: a community member choosing a First Nations service over RCMP because of trust).
6. Tenacity & patience: Establishing a service requires persistence, risk-taking, and long timelines. Expect heavy oversight and high expectations; Indigenous services must meet standards while advocating for equitable resourcing.
7. Opportunities: Simplify program reporting/terms to accommodate communities with limited administrative capacity; continue dialogues to reframe public safety holistically; prioritize forgiveness and relationship repair as part of engagement.

### **Practical Recommendations:**

1. Ensure initiatives are community-led (not imposed) and begin with ceremony and community consultation.
2. Strengthen governance training and ensure leadership advocates (not micromanages) for the service.
3. Seek flexible funding and local partnerships to support specialized units and crisis responses.
4. Embed cultural practices, language and Indigenous identity visibly in policing roles.
5. Public Safety Canada and provinces should simplify administrative requirements, practice cultural humility, and proactively rebuild trust with First Nations communities.

Quote-style highlights:

“It has to be community-driven.” — Grant Buckskin / Deborah Doss-Cody

“Tenacity, patience and relationship-building are essential.” — Panel consensus

“Start with asking for forgiveness and rebuild trust.” — Jolene Dione

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## Health and Wellness: Importance of Mental Health Practices for First Nations Police Services and Boards

Speaker: Lacey Runner, Director, Tsuut'ina Health & Wellness Services; clinician; trainer; PhD candidate

### Discussion context and rationale

Wellness and mental health supports must be acknowledged as essential parts of the First Nations policing ecosystem. Police services are often discussed through the language of response times, enforcement, investigations, staffing, and funding; however, the health of the people doing the work is equally foundational to public safety. First Nations police service members are asked to respond to crisis, violence, grief, addiction, suicide, family disruption, and community trauma, often in communities where they have deep personal, family, and cultural connections. For this reason, mental health and wellness supports cannot be treated as optional benefits or afterthoughts. They must be built into governance, policy, budgets, supervision, training, and the everyday culture of the service.

Lacey Runner's lived experience provides important context for why this conversation must be approached with honesty, humility, and compassion. Her sharing as a survivor of complex trauma, as a person connected to the intergenerational impacts of residential schools, and as someone who has experienced the loss of a brother to suicide, gives weight to the reality that mental health is not abstract. It is lived in families, communities, workplaces, and systems. Her perspective reinforces that people who serve in First Nations policing may be carrying their own histories of grief, colonial harm, family disruption, loss, and survival while also responding to the pain and crisis of others. This creates a layered reality that must be understood by police leaders, governance bodies, and funding partners.

Intergenerational trauma may compound the mental health instability experienced by First Nations police service members because the work can activate both occupational trauma and inherited or lived community trauma. An officer may attend calls involving suicide, domestic violence, child welfare, overdose, sudden death, or serious victimization while also knowing the families involved, recognizing patterns connected to colonial harm, or carrying personal memories of similar losses. Unlike some mainstream policing environments, First Nations officers may not be able to fully separate professional duty from personal identity, kinship, culture, and community belonging. This closeness can be a strength because it supports empathy, trust, and culturally grounded responses, but it also increases the need for intentional mental health protections and safe recovery spaces.

Destigmatizing mental health realities is therefore a governance and leadership responsibility. Police culture has often rewarded silence, toughness, and endurance, which can make officers hesitant to disclose distress, ask for help, or take time to recover. In First Nations police services, stigma may be further complicated by close community relationships, fear of being judged, fear of career consequences, or concern that confidentiality cannot be protected in a small community environment. Governance bodies and Chiefs of Police must clearly communicate that mental health injuries and stress responses are not failures of character. They are predictable human responses to repeated exposure to harm, grief, danger, and responsibility.

Safe spaces must be created so that officers, civilian staff, dispatchers, supervisors, board members, and families can speak openly about wellness without fear of punishment, shame, or gossip. These spaces may include confidential clinical supports, peer support, elder and knowledge keeper access, ceremony, critical incident debriefing, culturally grounded healing practices, wellness check-ins, family education, and pathways to external services when privacy is needed. Wellness supports should also be proactive, not only crisis-based. Services should build regular mental health check-ins, trauma-informed supervision, fatigue management, rest-and-recovery practices, and mental health literacy into their organizational rhythm.

Healthy officers are better able to support healthy communities. When officers are emotionally exhausted, unsupported, or carrying unresolved trauma, their decision-making, patience, empathy, and ability to de-escalate may be affected. When they are supported through culturally safe wellness systems, they are more likely to remain grounded, present, relational, and capable of providing the kind of public safety service that First Nations communities are asking for. Wellness is therefore not separate from operational readiness; it is part of readiness. It is also part of retention, recruitment, trust-building, and community confidence.

For governance bodies, the responsibility is to ensure that wellness is visible in policy, resourcing, and accountability. Boards and commissions can ask whether the service has confidential supports, culturally relevant healing pathways, critical incident protocols, peer support options, member wellness reporting, and funding dedicated to prevention and early intervention. They can also ensure that wellness conversations are normalized at the governance table. If First Nations policing is to remain rooted in community care, then the people who carry the responsibility of that care must also be cared for. Building and maintaining healthy communities requires healthy officers, healthy leadership, and governance systems that understand wellness as a core public safety requirement.

## Key themes and takeaways

1. Lacey shared personal background: survivor of complex trauma, second-generation residential school family, lost her brother to suicide (2012). Her experience informs her mental-health advocacy.
2. Trauma is intergenerational and shapes behaviour; healing requires acknowledgment, education and collective action.

3. First responders (police, RCMP, frontline workers) face high occupational trauma exposure → increased risk of PTSD, anxiety, depression, substance misuse, compassion fatigue, burnout and suicide ideation.
4. Police culture and stigma (stoicism, “code of silence”) are major barriers to help-seeking; confidentiality and fear of career consequences worsen underreporting.
5. Toxic stress accumulates and impairs decision-making and wellbeing; leaders must recognize signs (e.g., hyperarousal, memory problems, emotional detachment) and act early.
6. Practical supports recommended: regular mental-health check-ins, peer support/mentoring, confidential access to services, group therapy, evidence-based resilience training, rest-and-recovery policies, and mental-health literacy/psychoeducation.
7. Trauma-informed leadership and organizational policy change are essential: leaders should prioritize team support, remove punitive responses to disclosure, and implement trauma-informed frameworks.
8. Community partnership and public understanding are important to reduce blame/harassment of frontline workers while still holding systems accountable.
9. The talk centred on empathy, lived experience, and practical strategies: mental health is a shared responsibility requiring cultural change, confidential supports, and trauma-informed leadership to protect those who serve the community.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## Mental Health Support for First Responders (PSP Net)

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Speaker: Dr. Jill Price

### Discussion context and rationale

Dr. Jill Price's work provides important context for understanding mental health support as an operational requirement within policing, rather than an optional benefit used only after a crisis. Through her research and contribution to PSPNET, she has helped advance a free, confidential, evidence-based form of internet-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy designed with and for public safety personnel, including police and other first responders. Online access is particularly relevant for members working shifts, serving remote communities, facing wait lists or travel barriers, or hesitating to seek local care because of stigma and confidentiality concerns.

Dr. Price's presentation also reinforces the positive outcomes that become possible when first responders have timely and sufficient access to appropriate care. Evidence from PSPNET has shown promising reductions in symptoms associated with anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and related concerns, together with strong treatment satisfaction. Research involving Indigenous public safety personnel has likewise provided preliminary evidence of meaningful symptom improvement and comparable program use and satisfaction. These outcomes offer a practical rationale for investing in accessible care: when members can identify concerns early, receive confidential assistance and build skills for managing symptoms, they may be better positioned to remain healthy, sustain relationships, continue serving and seek further care when needed.

For First Nations police services, this rationale is especially significant. Officers may work with limited staffing, limited specialist supports and little separation between their professional responsibilities and their family, cultural and community relationships. Supporting their mental health contributes not only to individual wellness, but also to service continuity, retention, sound judgment, respectful communication and the capacity to remain present with community members during crisis. Healthy officers are better equipped to support healthy communities; however, this principle must be supported through stable funding, protected time, confidential pathways to care and culturally responsive options rather than relying on individual resilience alone.

The collection of mental health data is necessary if governance bodies, police leaders and funding partners are to understand whether supports are reaching members and producing positive outcomes. Quantitative information may include voluntary participation and completion rates, changes in validated symptom measures, wait times, referrals, sick leave trends, retention and member-reported confidence in managing mental health concerns. Data should be interpreted carefully, because a rise in help-seeking may reflect reduced stigma and increased trust rather than deteriorating wellness. Measures should therefore be used to improve systems, not to judge individuals or create employment consequences.

Qualitative information must be maintained alongside numerical outcomes. Confidential interviews, talking circles, open-ended feedback, advisory groups and conversations with officers, families, elders, clinicians and police leaders can explain why a support was helpful, why members disengaged, whether the language and examples were culturally safe, and what forms of care are missing. This information can reveal experiences that a symptom score alone cannot capture, including trust, cultural connection, moral injury, family impacts, workplace climate, accessibility and whether a member felt understood. Combining quantitative outcomes with qualitative knowledge creates a fuller and more accountable understanding of effectiveness.

This work must be governed ethically. Individual information should remain confidential, participation should be voluntary and informed, and reporting to leadership or a board should be aggregated and de-identified. First Nations governance bodies should help determine what information is collected, why it is needed, who may access it and how results will be returned to the service and community. Indigenous data governance principles and local Nation protocols should guide the process so that information is used for wellness planning, funding advocacy and continuous improvement, not surveillance or discipline.

## Key themes and takeaways

1. PSP Net: a free, confidential, evidence-based online iCBT program tailored for Public Safety Personnel (PSP) in Canada, co-designed with first responders and Indigenous communities and is ideal for shift workers and remote staff.
2. Prevalence: ~34% of policing staff screen positive for one or more mental health disorders (~36,000 officers).
3. Common issues: depression, PTSD, generalized/social anxiety, substance use; comorbidity is common.
4. Cause: cumulative occupational traumatic exposures reduce mental health over time; cadets show better baseline mental health than serving officers.
5. Barriers to care: cost, distance, wait times, shift work, stigma, confidentiality concerns, limited PSP-informed services, and lack of symptom awareness.

## What PSP Net provides

1. Format: internet-delivered Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (iCBT); English and French; no referral, no waitlist; funded by Public Safety Canada; available 24/7.
2. Courses: Well-being (targets anxiety, depression, PTSD), PTSD course, and a sleep course.
3. Delivery options: self-guided (6 months access) or optional therapist-guided (secure messaging and optional phone calls; up to 1 year access).
4. Quick enrollment: 20–30 min online screening → brief phone interview → same-week enrollment possible.
5. Well-being course structure: five lessons — symptom ID, thought-challenging, managing physical symptoms, behaviour change, relapse prevention; includes readings, audios, case stories, symptom tracking, and extra resources (anger, communication, moral injury).

### **Impact & Indigenous-focused work**

1. Co-design: ongoing advisory group with First Nations and Métis members, elders, PSP, researchers, and providers.
2. Results: Indigenous PSP showed significant symptom reductions after eight weeks; high satisfaction and perceived therapist skill.
3. Outreach: most Indigenous clients learn about PSP Net via workplace/peers.

### **Next steps / priorities**

1. Complete and publish First Nations wellness resource and embed Indigenous culture across materials.
2. Conduct qualitative interviews with First Nations clients.
3. Create an Indigenous ambassador program to reduce stigma and boost peer-to-peer awareness.
4. Expand therapist-guided availability nationally (goal: full coverage by 2026).
5. Develop additional iCBT modules beyond current courses.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## Building and Maintaining Strong Relationships with Leadership

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Moderator: Micayla B. Hayes, FNPGC Committee Member, CAPG Board member

Panellists: Violet Meguinis – Chair, Tosguna Tsuut’ina Police Commission

Maea Crowchild - Tosguna Tsuut’ina Police Service

Sherry Thomas – Chair, Manitoba First Nations Police Commission

### Discussion context and rationale

Strong and accountable relationships between the Police Governance Chair, the broader governance body, the Chief of Police, senior police leadership, and the leaders of elected bodies are essential to the success of First Nations policing. These relationships create the conditions for effective oversight, clear communication, shared purpose, and community confidence. When governance leaders and police leaders understand one another’s roles, responsibilities, pressures, and limitations, they are better able to work together in a way that supports the service without interfering in operations, protects the independence of policing decisions, and ensures that the needs and priorities of the community remain at the centre of public safety planning.

The Chair has a particularly important role in this relationship. The Chair often becomes the primary bridge between the board or commission, the Chief of Police, Chief and Council or other elected leadership, administration, funding partners, and the community. This role requires trust, discipline, humility, and consistency. The Chair must be able to support the Chief of Police while also asking difficult questions, monitoring performance, ensuring accountability, and helping the governance body stay focused on policy, strategy, community priorities, and long-term sustainability. This balance is important because a relationship that is too distant may create misunderstanding and isolation, while a relationship that is too informal or political may weaken accountability and blur the line between governance and operations.

Key themes from the gathering reinforced that relationships must be grounded in alignment of purpose, role clarity, cultural humility, transparency, and a learner mindset. Governance bodies and police leaders must share a common vision for community safety, wellbeing, and cultural values. They must also understand the distinction between governance and operations: boards and commissions provide civilian oversight, approve policy, support strategic direction, advocate for resources, and hold the Chief accountable, while the Chief leads the police service and makes operational decisions. When these responsibilities are clearly understood, the relationship becomes stronger because each party can contribute fully without overstepping or withdrawing from its responsibilities.

Accountable relationships are also necessary because policing takes place within a wider leadership environment. Elected leaders carry responsibility for the Nation, public expectations, political advocacy, budgets, and relationships with provincial and federal governments. Police Chiefs carry responsibility for service delivery, officer wellness, community response, operational readiness, and the difficult realities of policing in communities affected by trauma, underfunding, addiction, violence, grief, and systemic inequity. Governance bodies must be able to sit between these realities in a constructive way. They can translate community concerns into governance priorities, help leadership understand operational constraints, help the Chief understand political and community expectations, and ensure that difficult issues are addressed openly rather than avoided.

Several examples discussed throughout the gathering show how strong relationships lead to better policing outcomes. Cultural practices such as smudging, language learning, ceremony, elder involvement, culturally specific responses to deaths and victims, and mandatory cultural orientation for new members require support from police leadership, governance bodies, and elected leadership. Community engagement sessions, youth programs, dashboards, workplace culture assessments, succession planning, and transparent reporting also require trust between the board or commission and the Chief. These practices cannot be sustained by one person or one office alone; they depend on a shared commitment to community presence, communication, and follow-through.

Trust and confidence in policing are built over time through visible accountability. Communities are more likely to trust a police service when they see that the Chief, the governance body, and elected leadership are communicating, responding to concerns, acknowledging shortcomings, and working together on practical solutions. This is especially important in First Nations communities where colonial harms, intergenerational trauma, and past experiences with policing have damaged confidence in public safety systems. A strong governance relationship can help make policing feel less like an external authority and more like a service rooted in community responsibility, cultural respect, and shared care.

These relationships must also be nourished and maintained. A strong relationship at the beginning of a new police service, a new board term, or a new elected leadership term is not enough. Relationships can weaken through leadership turnover, elections, conflict, funding pressure, crisis response, communication gaps, or unclear expectations. For this reason, governance bodies should make relationship maintenance an intentional practice. This may include regular meetings between the Chair and Chief, structured reporting to the full board or commission, scheduled engagement with elected leadership, shared strategic planning, annual performance conversations, orientation for new leaders, conflict resolution protocols, and ongoing training in governance, cultural humility, trauma-informed practice, and community accountability.

Maintaining the relationship also means creating systems that outlast individual personalities. Succession planning, onboarding, mentorship, written terms of reference, clear policies, shared dashboards, public communications, and consistent community engagement help preserve alignment when people change roles. This protects the community from instability and ensures that governance remains steady, transparent, and effective. When the Chair, governance body, Chief of Police, police leaders, and elected leadership continue to invest in one another with honesty, respect, and accountability, they strengthen the foundation for policing that is responsive, culturally grounded, trusted, and capable of serving the community.

### **Key themes and takeaways**

1. Panel discussion on building strong, accountable relationships between Police Service Boards/Commissions and police leadership in First Nations contexts.
2. Alignment of purpose: Boards and leadership must share clear goals and a common vision focused on community safety, wellbeing and cultural values (Violet).
3. Continuous learning: Leaders, board members and staff should adopt a learner mindset—entering spaces ready to listen and adapt (Maea).
4. Governance vs. operations: Clear role definitions and governance understanding are essential to effective oversight and mutual support (Sherry).
5. Cultural integration: Training, policies and everyday practice should reflect community cultural values, trauma-informed principles and language/cultural revitalization (Sherry, Maesa).
6. Trust-building practices: Visibility, consistent engagement, openness to feedback, timely conflict resolution and demonstrated personal integrity build trust (Violet, Maesa).
7. Succession & onboarding: Succession planning, mentorship and structured onboarding keep relationships aligned through leadership turnover or elections (Sherry, Violet).

8. Assessment & transparency: Regular health checks, anonymous culture/ workplace assessments, dashboards and open data (calls for service, response times, community engagement) help monitor relationship health (Maea, Sherry).
9. Accountability as community presence: Accountability includes accessibility, ongoing community engagement, public communications and participation in community life (Violet).

### **Practical examples & practices**

1. Cultural practices embedded in service: smudging, language classes, culturally specific response protocols for deaths and victims, and mandatory cultural orientation for new members (Maea).
2. Training academy & local recruitment: Building local training with cultural curriculum to produce officers trained in community realities (Sherry).
3. Conflict handling: Address issues promptly, prepare documentation, seek legal/peer advice, define consequences, and monitor corrective actions (Violet).

### **Indicators of healthy relationships**

1. Regular check-ins and open-door communication between the board and the chief.
2. External or anonymous workplace culture assessments showing improvement.
3. Shared strategic plans, clear performance management and joint public reporting.
4. Visible community engagement by officers and leadership (events, youth programs).
5. Smooth leadership transitions supported by mentorship and succession planning.

### **Actions agreed / suggested**

1. Continue and expand community engagement sessions to report on programs and build accountability.
2. Track and publish operational and engagement metrics on a shared dashboard for board access.
3. Develop and follow succession/onboarding plans and report training outcomes at future conferences.
4. Emphasis on mutual respect, cultural humility, wellness/self-care for leaders, and the need for equitable funding and local autonomy in policing approaches.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## Provincial Factors: Policing in First Nations Across Canada

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Moderator: Tyler Oka, CAPG board member, FNPGC council member

Panellists: Dan Bellegarde, Chair File Hills First Nations Police Services, SK

Amanda Nevue, Annishnabek Police Services, ON

Mike Evans, Executive Advisor, Lake Shore Police Services, AB

### Discussion context and rationale

First Nations police services operate within a complicated framework that is shaped by the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program (FNIPP), provincial policing legislation, federal and provincial funding responsibilities, and the inherent right of First Nations to determine how safety should be organized in a First Nation community. The FNIPP has supported the creation and continuation of self-administered police services and enhanced policing arrangements, the panel discussion made clear that the program model still creates significant challenges. First Nations policing is often funded and administered as a program or contribution agreement rather than recognized and resourced as an essential service. This distinction matters because program-based funding can be short-term, conditional, administratively heavy, and vulnerable to negotiation delays, while policing itself requires stable staffing, consistent infrastructure, specialized capacity, long-term planning, and reliable accountability to the community.

The federal framework generally relies on cost-shared agreements between Canada and the province or territory, with First Nations participating through tripartite or related arrangements. Public Safety Canada describes FNIPP funding as supporting First Nations and Inuit police services, enhanced policing agreements, community safety officers, and other policing initiatives, generally using a 52 percent federal and 48 percent provincial or territorial cost-share. This structure can create difficulty when one partner is ready to move but another is not, when provincial budget cycles do not align with federal commitments, or when funding negotiations occur too close to the expiry of existing agreements. For a First Nations police service, a delay is not simply administrative; it can affect officer retention, hiring, training, equipment, dispatch, facilities, specialty support, and the confidence of the community that the service will continue.

The panel themes also highlighted that provincial police acts create uneven circumstances across the country. First Nations services may be authorized, regulated, inspected, or constrained under different provincial legislation, even when the public safety needs of First Nations communities are similar. This means that a board or commission in one province may have different powers, obligations, complaint processes, standards, reporting requirements, appointment rules, or access to provincial supports than a board or commission in another province. As a result, First Nations policing can become fragmented by jurisdiction rather than guided by a consistent national recognition of First Nations authority, Treaty relationships, Section 35 rights, and the need for culturally grounded public safety systems.

Working under provincial police acts can also create tension between self-administered policing and true self-determination. A First Nations police service may be described as self-administered because it has its own Chief, officers, governance body, and community mandate; however, it may still be required to operate within provincial standards, provincial appointment systems, provincial complaint or oversight structures, and provincial interpretations of what policing should look like. The panel described this distinction as important: self-administered does not necessarily mean fully autonomous. First Nations may be building their own services while still having to fit into systems that were not designed by them, for them, or with full recognition of First Nations laws, governments, languages, ceremonies, and community safety philosophies.

These legislative differences affect practical policing circumstances. A smaller First Nations service may be expected to meet the same policing standards as larger municipal or provincial services while having fewer officers, fewer administrative staff, limited access to training seats, limited backup, and little or no internal specialty capacity. When serious incidents occur, such as homicide, organized crime, fentanyl trafficking, sudden deaths, or major investigations, the service may need to rely on RCMP, provincial, municipal, or regional specialty units. If those units are distant, unavailable, unfamiliar with the community, or working under different protocols, the result may be delay, confusion, distress for families, and reduced community confidence. The panel examples concerning major crime response, forensics, canine capacity, highway and transit corridors, and recruitment pressures all demonstrate how jurisdictional design can create real consequences at the community level.

The challenges are also financial and administrative. When First Nations policing is treated through a contribution program, boards and police leaders must spend significant time proving need, preparing reports, negotiating renewals, managing eligible expense rules, and responding to funding constraints instead of focusing fully on strategic public safety planning. Short agreement terms can prevent succession planning, wage parity, pensions, infrastructure planning, and the creation of specialized or proactive units. Panel participants described how this leaves services in a reactive posture, even when they are expected to address complex community realities such as addictions, suicide, violence, trauma, homelessness, child and family disruption, and the presence of organized crime. The service may be culturally trusted and operationally capable, but still structurally limited by funding and legislative frameworks that do not match the seriousness of the work.

In this context, governance bodies carry a difficult but necessary responsibility. Boards and commissions must understand the provincial act that governs them, the FNIPP funding agreement that sustains the service, the expectations of Canada and the province, and the priorities of their Nation. They must advocate for stable and equitable funding while also protecting the operational independence of the Chief of Police. They must support compliance with provincial standards while also insisting that culture, language, ceremony, trauma-informed practice, and local community priorities are not treated as extras. They must also help elected leadership and funding partners understand that First Nations policing cannot be measured only by enforcement outputs; it must also be measured by trust, presence, prevention, wellness, cultural safety, and community-defined outcomes.

The panel takeaways point toward a need for coordinated advocacy and capacity-building. First Nations police boards, Chiefs of Police, political leadership, provincial partners, Canada, and national organizations must work together to move from fragmented program administration toward recognition of First Nations policing as an essential service. This includes longer-term agreements, equitable resourcing, access to pension and wage parity, support for training and recruitment, flexible funding for specialized units, shared specialty capacity across First Nations services, and clearer pathways to self-determined policing. At the same time, communities may need to take incremental steps, building governance capacity, documenting service gaps, gathering community input, strengthening data and reporting, and preparing for future legislative opportunities when political conditions allow.

## Key themes and takeaways

1. Panel discussion on provincial factors affecting First Nations policing across Canada, current operating realities, and paths toward greater self-determination.
2. Jurisdiction & legislation: Provincial policing acts and division of federal/provincial powers constrain First Nations policing; Section 35 (Indigenous rights) is often overlooked in practice.- Treaty.

3. Self-administered vs. autonomous: There are 36 self-administered First Nations police services (provincially governed). No fully autonomous, self-determined First Nations policing system exists nationally yet.
4. Systemic barriers: Underfunding, inequitable access to specialized services (forensics, canine, Major Crimes), and systemic racism within justice systems were repeatedly identified.
5. Operational challenges: Recruitment, retention, and limited staffing capacity leave many First Nations services vulnerable—smaller services cannot reliably backfill or sustain specialty units.
6. Provincial variation: Policing acts differ significantly by province (e.g., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario), producing uneven recognition and supports for First Nations services.
7. Federal/Provincial relationships: Tripartite agreements fund many services, but negotiations with provincial ministries can be slow, inconsistent, and sometimes unsupportive, creating funding and liability risks.
8. Pathways & capacity-building: Boards and services are working to build governance and operational capacity so political leadership can pursue self-determination when ready. Modern treaty regimes may offer clearer pathways for future autonomy.

### **Notable examples & observations**

1. Ontario: Community Safety and Policing Act (CSPA) offers an opt-in option and potential funding advantages but may risk reduced autonomy; Anishinaabe Police Service is evaluating and gathering community input.
2. Alberta/RCMP: Reliance on RCMP/contract policing and changes to RCMP deployment of Major Crimes teams have caused delays and distress in some communities.
3. Local initiatives: Some services have begun building culturally informed supports (e.g., hiring a traditional knowledge keeper at APS) to improve member wellness and community responsiveness.

### **Risks & Concerns**

1. Potential lapses in funding and short negotiation timelines (example: Lakeshore service faced a funding gap effective April 1).
2. Delays or mismatches in specialized response (e.g., major crime teams deployed from distant locations).
3. Provincial legislation or policy changes (e.g., complaint review processes) that may reduce local oversight.

## Opportunities & Recommendations (panel consensus)

1. Strengthen tripartite negotiations to secure stable, multi-year funding and conditions that allow culturally appropriate special units.
2. Build provincial/Inter-First Nations cooperation for shared specialty capacity rather than fragmented, jurisdictional competition.
3. Advocate collectively (boards, Chiefs of Police associations, political leadership) for legislative recognition of First Nations policing needs and clearer pathways to self-determination.
4. Continue capacity-building (governance, recruitment, specialized training) so communities are ready when political agreements for greater autonomy become possible.

## Closing note

1. Panellists emphasized incremental progress (“baby steps”), the need for coordinated advocacy, and balancing immediate operational needs with long-term goals for self-determination in First Nations policing.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## First Nations Policing Program (FNIPP): First Nations Funding Challenges

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Moderator: Stephen Reid, Executive Director of CAPG

Panellists: Rebecca Barley, Chair of St'at'imc Tribal Police Board

Tyler Oka, Blood Tribe Police Service, member CAPG

Dwayne Zacharie, Chief, Kahnawake Peacekeepers

### Discussion context and rationale

The First Nations and Inuit Policing Program has helped support dedicated policing arrangements in many First Nations communities, but the way it is administered continues to create instability for communities, police services, governance bodies, and officers. Public Safety Canada describes the FNIPP as a program that funds First Nations and Inuit police services, enhanced policing arrangements, community safety officers, other policing initiatives, and Community Tripartite Agreements involving the RCMP, generally through a 52 percent federal and 48 percent provincial or territorial cost-share. This structure is important because it acknowledges shared responsibility; however, it also means that First Nations policing is often dependent on multiple governments, different budget cycles, changing political priorities, and contribution agreement rules that do not always match the daily reality of providing safe, effective, culturally grounded policing in communities.

A central challenge is that First Nations policing is still too often treated as a program rather than an essential service. Policing requires permanent readiness: officers must be recruited, trained, supervised, equipped, housed, supported, and retained; dispatch, records, vehicles, facilities, technology, court obligations, crisis response, major investigations, wellness supports, and community engagement must all continue regardless of whether a funding agreement is being renewed. When agreements are short-term, delayed, narrowly defined, or tied to annual spending rules, the police service cannot plan with confidence. The result is instability in staffing, succession planning, wages, pensions, training, infrastructure, and specialized capacity. Communities may experience this instability as reduced visibility, slower response, fewer proactive patrols, limited prevention work, and greater reliance on outside agencies during emergencies.

The Auditor General of Canada's 2024 report reinforces the seriousness of these concerns. The report found that Public Safety Canada did not work in partnership with Indigenous communities to provide equitable access to policing services tailored to their needs, and that program funds went unspent even while communities continued to face safety needs. It also found that Public Safety Canada did not have an equitable funding allocation approach and that both Public Safety Canada and the RCMP lacked sufficient information to know whether policing agreements were being met or whether the program was achieving intended results. These findings speak directly to the instability described by First Nations police leaders: when the system cannot reliably allocate, disburse, monitor, and evaluate funding in partnership with communities, the burden of uncertainty is carried by the people who depend on the service.

This instability is not only administrative; it affects public safety. First Nations communities can face high needs related to trauma, addictions, suicide, organized crime, family violence, missing persons, sudden deaths, and geographic or seasonal isolation. Many services are asked to meet the same standards expected of larger municipal or provincial police services while operating with fewer officers, limited backup, fewer administrative supports, and restricted access to specialized units such as major crimes, forensics, canine, tactical response, mental health crisis teams, or organized-crime capacity. When one serious incident absorbs a small service, general patrol, prevention, and community presence can quickly become strained. This forces services into a reactive posture when First Nations communities are asking for proactive, visible, relational, culturally grounded policing.

RCMP contract policing and Community Tripartite Agreements present additional challenges. Under these arrangements, the RCMP may provide a dedicated policing presence intended to supplement provincial or territorial policing; however, governance and accountability can remain distant from the community. First Nations may not have the same localized governance authority that exists with a self-administered police service, board, commission, or police authority. Without strong local governance, communities may have limited ability to set priorities, monitor performance, influence deployment, require culturally grounded practices, or hold the service accountable in ways that reflect local laws, languages, ceremony, trauma histories, and community expectations. The Auditor General found that the RCMP did not consistently meet Community Tripartite Agreement terms, including dedicated-time expectations, and that staffing shortages left some First Nations and Inuit communities underserved. These findings demonstrate that contract policing can create gaps between what agreements promise and what communities actually receive.

The absence of localized governance capability is especially significant because policing in First Nations communities cannot be separated from community trust. A governance body provides a place where community concerns, complaints, priorities, strategic plans, cultural expectations, data, budgets, and accountability can be discussed in relation to the police service. It also helps protect operational independence while ensuring that the Chief of Police or police provider remains connected to community-defined outcomes. Where local governance is weak, informal, under-resourced, or externalized through contract policing, First Nations may be left advocating from the outside rather than directing the values, priorities, and accountability mechanisms that should shape public safety in their own territories.

The key takeaway from the panel is that First Nations police services are delivering trusted, community-centred policing under conditions that remain structurally unstable. The services are expected to be culturally responsive, trauma-informed, visible, accountable, and operationally capable, while the funding and governance framework often prevents the long-term planning required to meet those expectations. Moving forward requires recognition of First Nations policing as an essential service, stable multi-year funding, equitable officer and infrastructure resourcing, pension and wage parity, access to training and specialized capacity, stronger federal-provincial-First Nations negotiation, and governance structures that are local, civilian, trained, and accountable to the communities being served.

### Key themes and takeaways

1. Purpose: Panel discussion on challenges and solutions for funding, governance, recruitment, retention, and service delivery in self-administered First Nations police services across Canada.
2. Overall finding: Current FNIPP funding model is inadequate — short-term, inflexible agreements and program framing prevent strategic planning, specialist units, wage parity, pensions and long-term sustainability.
3. Core problems identified:
4. Agreements are often short (many 1–5 years), preventing long-term planning and retention.
5. Per-officer funding gaps vs. RCMP/municipal services (~\$30–\$40K per officer) strain budgets.
6. Heavy reporting and “grant/program” framing create administrative burdens and spending-by-year limits with no contingency.
7. Provincial variability produces unequal support across jurisdictions; Quebec noted as particularly difficult.
8. Indigenous policing is treated as an “enhancement” rather than an essential service.

9. Training access (limited academy seats) and competition from larger services reduce recruitment and increase attrition.
10. High community needs (crime, addictions, suicide) and geographic/routing burdens (highways, transit corridors) increase demand on limited resources.
11. Prejudice and lack of awareness from other police agencies and boards hinder partnerships and support.

## **Impacts**

1. Difficulty recruiting and retaining officers (lower pay, weaker pension/benefits).
2. Reactive-only policing; inability to field specialized or proactive units.
3. Risk to community safety and national security if self-administered services decline.
4. Loss of institutional knowledge and stalled succession planning.

## **Positive notes / progress**

1. Incremental gains from advocacy (FNCPA position paper, human rights complaints) led to some funding and policy flexibility.
2. Examples of 10-year agreements and pension access in some services; some communities increasing applicant interest.
3. Strong community trust and culturally grounded community policing delivered by self-administered services.

## **Suggested priorities / recommendations from panel**

1. Reclassify First Nations policing as an essential service with stable, long-term funding (multi-year agreements, equitable per-officer funding).
2. Align funding and reporting approaches with other essential Indigenous services (e.g., health) to ensure predictable flows and reduce onerous short-term spending rules.
3. Invest in wage parity, pensions and training capacity to improve recruitment and retention.
4. Enable flexible funding for specialized units (forensics, organized-crime response, mental-health crisis teams).
5. Improve federal/provincial engagement and true negotiated agreements with Indigenous leadership, and expand advocacy and awareness among municipal boards and partner agencies.

6. Support governance capacity (boards/commissions) and community engagement for strategic planning and succession.

### **Immediate actions mentioned**

1. Continue advocacy through associations (FNCPA, provincial/territorial groups) and leverage human rights and audit findings.
2. Build partnerships (municipal, provincial, international knowledge sharing) to strengthen proposals and funding cases.
3. Prepare for upcoming funding expiries (e.g., March 31, 2026) by early engagement with Public Safety and provinces.

### **Takeaway:**

Indigenous self-administered police services deliver trusted, community-centered policing but are chronically underfunded and constrained by programmatic structures. Moving to essential-service status, longer-term equitable funding, improved training/pension supports, and stronger federal-provincial-Indigenous negotiation are key to sustainability and public safety.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## Policing First Nations, Municipal and Urban Policing Considerations

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Moderator: Teddy Manywounds, FNPGC Chair, CAPG Board member

Panellists: Derek McIntyre, Edmonton Police Service Acting Deputy Chief

Corey Dayley, Deputy Chief Calgary Police Service

### Discussion context and rationale

First Nations police governance conversations must include municipal and large urban centre police services because many First Nations, Indigenous, and Inuit people live, study, work, access health care, receive services, and raise families away from their home communities. Urban centres are not separate from First Nations public safety realities; they are part of the same movement of people, families, Nations, and responsibilities. Statistics Canada reported that more than one million Indigenous people were living in urban areas in 2021, and census materials also recognize that many students, workers, and people seeking services move between remote, reserve, northern, Inuit, and urban locations. This means that a First Nations person's experience of policing may involve a self-administered First Nations police service at home, the RCMP in another jurisdiction, and a municipal service in a city where they attend school, work, sustain homes, access care, or interact with municipal services and hospitals.

Including municipal and urban police services in the governance conversation is therefore not a departure from First Nations policing; it is a necessary extension of it. First Nations governance bodies, Chiefs of Police, urban police leaders, Indigenous organizations, friendship centres, shelters, education institutions, health providers, and community agencies all encounter the same people at different points in their lives. If these systems do not speak to one another, First Nations people may experience fragmented care, inconsistent safety planning, repeated storytelling of traumatic experiences, or service gaps when they move between reserve and urban spaces. A more inclusive governance conversation can help build continuity so that public safety follows the person and the family, rather than stopping at jurisdictional boundaries.

Large urban police services also carry responsibility for understanding the traumatic history of policing Indigenous peoples. This includes the role of policing in colonial systems, residential schools, forced removals, child welfare interventions, criminalization of poverty and homelessness, over-policing, under-protection, and the ongoing impacts of systemic racism. A trauma-informed lens does not excuse crime or remove accountability; rather, it helps officers, supervisors, dispatchers, investigators, and governance leaders understand how historical harm affects trust, behaviour, crisis response, help-seeking, and perceptions of safety. When police members understand trauma, they are better positioned to slow situations down, listen with humility, avoid unnecessary escalation, communicate clearly, and connect people with culturally relevant supports where appropriate.

The panel themes show that some municipal services are already trying to move in this direction. The discussion identified work in Calgary, Edmonton, and Winnipeg related to Indigenous advisory bodies, elders councils, anti-racism work, Indigenous cultural awareness training, trauma-informed approaches, de-escalation, language supports, youth initiatives, street outreach, and partnerships with Indigenous-led organizations. These efforts matter because they help move reconciliation from symbolism into daily practice. However, the section also makes clear that progress is uneven and must be measured by what changes for Indigenous people during real interactions with police: whether they are treated with dignity, whether officers understand local histories, whether elders and community supports are used appropriately, whether complaints and concerns are taken seriously, and whether Indigenous voices shape policy before decisions are finalized.

For governance, this means municipal police boards, commissions, and large urban police executives should be part of the same learning circle as First Nations police governance leaders. Urban police governance bodies can learn from First Nations policing models that emphasize relationship over authority, culture over rigid procedure, prevention over reaction, and community-defined priorities over imposed approaches. At the same time, First Nations governance leaders can use these relationships to advocate for better urban responses for their citizens, members, and relatives who live away from home. This may include protocols for missing persons, death notifications, domestic violence, mental health crisis response, encampments, youth safety, school safety, addictions, organized crime recruitment, human trafficking, and transport between jurisdictions.

An inclusive approach also requires respect for the diversity of First Nations, Inuit, and Indigenous populations in cities. Urban Indigenous communities are not all the same, and they should not be treated as one generic group. Some people maintain strong daily relationships with their home Nations; others may be disconnected because of child welfare, family disruption, violence, poverty, or migration. Inuit and Métis populations may have different governance structures, cultural practices, service needs, and urban organizations. Municipal police services therefore need ongoing relationships with local Indigenous governments, urban Indigenous organizations, elders, knowledge keepers, youth, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, families of missing and murdered Indigenous people, and service providers so that policies and practices reflect lived realities rather than assumptions.

The key takeaway is that First Nations police governance cannot be limited to the boundaries of reserve-based policing. Public safety must reflect where First Nations, Indigenous, and Inuit people actually live and move. Municipal and urban police services must be included as partners in governance, accountability, training, data, reconciliation, and trauma-informed practice. This strengthens the whole public safety system by helping ensure that Indigenous people receive respectful, culturally informed, humane, and effective service whether they are at home, travelling, studying, working, seeking care, or living in a large urban centre.

## **Purpose & Focus**

1. Panel on how urban/municipal police services in Calgary, Edmonton, and Winnipeg are working with First Nations and Indigenous communities.
2. Themes: trust-building, reconciliation, cultural safety, leadership, and system reform.

## **Building Trust with Indigenous Communities**

1. Acknowledgement of historic and ongoing harms and the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in homelessness, victimization, and system contact.
2. Police leaders stressed “stepping back” so Indigenous elders, leaders, and organizations can shape priorities, policies, and programs.
3. Use of race-based data (e.g., in Calgary) to confront inequities and align with social agencies seeing the same patterns.
4. Expansion of trauma-informed and Indigenous-informed training so officers can apply this learning in day-to-day practice.

## **Centering Indigenous Voices in Policy and Governance**

1. Edmonton highlighted moving away from “a room of white people deciding how to police the city.”
2. Creation of Indigenous Elders Councils and Indigenous-led advisory bodies that are consulted early, not after decisions are made.
3. Shift from a “warrior” to a “guardian” mentality: policing as protection, care, and relationship.
4. Emphasis that Indigenous leadership must help define both the problems and the solutions, not just be informed of outcomes.

## **Partnerships, Services, and System Reform**

1. Winnipeg experience: police ended up doing social and health work they were never designed for, especially with intoxicated or highly vulnerable people.

2. Formation of alliances of community leaders (including Indigenous leadership) to design street outreach, facilities, and a tiered safety network so the right services respond.
3. Call for proper funding of both police and non-police systems (housing, health, social services) to prevent criminalizing illness and poverty.

### **Training, Anti-Racism, and De-escalation**

1. Anti-racism and cultural awareness are treated as core, not optional.
2. Calgary developed a 16-module Indigenous cultural awareness program with elders and knowledge keepers, focusing on colonial history and lived experience.
3. Alberta standards now require de-escalation as central to use-of-force training, supported by scenario-based practice.
4. Community questions highlighted the need to measure how many hours and how much funding actually go into de-escalation, communication, and trauma-informed care, including for emerging First Nations police services.

### **Reconciliation in Action (Beyond Symbolism)**

1. Clear distinction between performative gestures and substantive change.
2. Examples of action:
3. Co-created Indigenous Action Plans to guide policy and operations.
4. Practices within services that support Indigenous officers (e.g., swearing affidavits with an eagle feather, smudging spaces after critical incidents).
5. Joint youth academies with Indigenous organizations to connect Indigenous youth with culture and public safety careers.
6. Acknowledged gaps in Indigenous representation on police commissions and at senior ranks; focus on long-term, merit-based development rather than tokenism.

### **Language, Humanity, and Wellness**

1. Community members underlined the power of Indigenous languages in de-escalation and grounding people in crisis.
2. Services are exploring technology that supports Indigenous language translation and offering voluntary Indigenous language classes (e.g., Blackfoot).
3. Stories of officers simply treating Indigenous people “like a human” showed how dehumanization has been normalized for many.
4. Strong message that officer wellness is essential: unwell, overburdened officers cannot consistently deliver respectful, humane service.

## Overall Message

1. There is a shared move toward relationship-based, Indigenous-led, upstream approaches to public safety.
2. Progress is real but uneven and incomplete; it requires sustained commitment from police leadership, governance bodies, and Indigenous communities working together.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## Address from the Honourable Mike Ellis, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services

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Deputy Premier Mike Ellis, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services for the Government of Alberta, has been working to build more positive and practical relationships with First Nations and Indigenous communities by approaching public safety as a shared responsibility rather than a service imposed from outside the community. His remarks aligned with the broader theme of the gathering: First Nations policing must be understood as community-centred, culturally grounded, and essential to safety, wellness, and self-determination. In this context, his support for First Nations-led policing reflects an important recognition that communities are best positioned to understand their own public safety needs, priorities, histories, and local realities.

A key part of this relationship-building has been the creation and use of advisory spaces where Indigenous voices can shape the direction of provincial public safety policy. Alberta's Public Security Indigenous Advisory Committee was established to provide advice and recommendations on public safety initiatives, including police and peace officer reform, restorative justice, victim services, and crime prevention. The committee was described as a way to support ongoing dialogue, shape policy and program direction, foster mutual understanding, improve collaboration with Indigenous communities, and help ensure government processes better align with the evolving needs of Indigenous communities across Alberta. Minister Ellis' statement that government must work closely with Indigenous Peoples to ensure safety efforts are responsive to Indigenous communities reinforces the importance of listening before decisions are finalized.

This approach is also connected to Alberta's work on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit Plus people. Dialogue with the Premier's Council on MMIWG2S+ provides an opportunity for the Minister and provincial officials to hear directly about the public safety, policing, justice, prevention, victim services, and accountability needs of Indigenous women, girls, families, survivors, and communities. The Council's work is focused on advancing safety, dignity, and economic security, while Alberta's MMIWG Roadmap identifies community wellness and justice-system improvement as a pathway for reducing violence and increasing safety. Engagement with this Council can help ensure that policing discussions are not limited to enforcement, but include prevention, trauma-informed response, family supports, culturally safe services, and the voices of those most affected by violence.

Minister Ellis' support for First Nations policing as an essential service is significant because it responds directly to the instability described throughout this report. When First Nations policing is treated as discretionary or program-based, communities face uncertainty in staffing, recruitment, retention, training, infrastructure, specialized response, and long-term planning. Essential-service recognition would support a more stable foundation for police services that are expected to respond to complex and urgent realities, including organized crime, fentanyl and carfentanil harms, violence, missing persons, youth safety, emergency response, and community trauma. His comments about retaining officers and ensuring access to investigative, tactical, and canine supports reflect the practical consequences of this essential-service discussion: stable policing requires more than patrol presence; it requires full operational capacity.

His relationship-based approach can also be seen in Alberta's support for communities exploring local and self-administered policing models. Public reporting has described provincial funding for Indigenous and municipal police transition studies, including grants designed to help communities assess whether a local, self-administered, or regional policing model would better meet their needs. Reporting on Siksika Nation's policing transition also described Alberta's support for Indigenous self-administered policing and the importance of ensuring any transition from RCMP policing to a new police service occurs without interruptions in vital services. These examples align with the broader principle that policing models should be shaped by the people who live in the community and understand its needs.

The larger takeaway from his address is that positive relationships between provincial government and First Nations cannot be built only through funding announcements or formal agreements. They require advisory circles, regular dialogue, humility, follow-through, and a willingness to hear difficult truths about the history and present-day impacts of policing Indigenous peoples. By championing First Nations policing as an essential service, engaging advisory structures, and listening to MMIWG2S+ leadership and families, Alberta can continue moving toward a public safety model that is more responsive, more accountable, and more aligned with First Nations self-determination, community wellness, and reconciliation.

## Building Relationships with First Nations and Indigenous Communities

1. Deputy Premier Mike Ellis thanked the First Nations Police Governance Council and affirmed support for First Nations-led policing.
2. Emphasis on community-centric policing: recruit from communities so police are "an extension and a reflection of the communities that they serve."
3. Advocacy to make First Nations policing funding an essential service to retain officers and provide investigative, tactical, and canine support.
4. \$1.5 million committed for a Tsuut'ina/Redwood Meadows satellite police office to reduce response times.

5. Recovery-Oriented System of Care (Alberta model): virtual opioid dependency program, Counselling Alberta, and community recovery centres—reported dramatic reductions in regional overdose deaths.
6. Concern about organized crime and carfentanil-laced fentanyl causing multiple deaths in Edmonton and Calgary; coordination with the RCMP and the Edmonton Police noted.

### **Representative quotes (verbatim)**

1. "no longer will we have policing seen as an arm of the state, but instead an extension and a reflection of the communities that they serve."
2. "I'm proud to have provided \$1.5 million for Tsuut'ina a in the new satellite office that they are creating in Redwood Meadows."

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## Building Relationships: First Nations People and the Current State of Policing

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Moderator: Tyler Oka, Blood tribe police services, CAPG/ FNP GC member

Panellists: Taylor Sayers, UCCM Anishinaabe Police Service Director Corporate Services

Jerel Swamp, Chief of Police, RAMA Police Service

Dawn Blake, Inspector, Tosguna Tsuut'ina Police Service

### Discussion context and rationale

This panel provided an opportunity to speak honestly about the current state of policing for First Nations people and communities. The discussion was not only about identifying problems; it was also about recognizing the strengths, resilience, and innovation that exist within First Nations police services. The purpose was to help people who were not in the room understand the realities faced by services across Canada, including the pressures of under-resourcing, the importance of community-driven solutions, and the ways First Nations police services continue to provide culturally grounded safety despite operating within systems that often do not fully recognize or fund their work as essential.

First Nations people expect what every community expects from policing: visibility, timely response, professionalism, accountability, safety, and respect. The difference is that many First Nations communities are asking for these standards while also carrying the weight of colonial history, intergenerational trauma, racism, jurisdictional gaps, and chronic underfunding. This means the current state of policing cannot be understood only through response times or officer numbers. It must also be understood through trust, relationship, cultural safety, trauma-informed practice, and whether the police service is seen by the community as belonging to them rather than being imposed upon them.

The panel themes show that many First Nations police services are being asked to meet the same standards as larger municipal, provincial, or federal services while working with fewer officers, weaker infrastructure, and limited access to specialized supports. In remote or seasonally isolated communities, officers may work alone, drive long distances, respond without reliable cellular coverage, or wait significant periods for backup. When major incidents occur, such as homicides, serious assaults, sudden deaths, missing persons, or complex drug investigations, a small service can be stretched quickly. Officers may be pulled away from general patrol for extended periods, leaving less time for prevention, youth engagement, traffic safety, wellness checks, and the everyday presence that builds trust.

This creates a difficult contradiction. First Nations police services are often among the most trusted and culturally responsive policing models available to their communities, yet they are frequently placed in the least stable operational conditions. Their strength comes from relationship-based policing: officers know families, understand local history, recognize language and ceremony, and often carry personal connections to the people they serve. These relationships can support de-escalation, reduce unnecessary use of force, and allow officers to respond with dignity during moments of grief, crisis, or loss. However, those same relationships also place emotional pressure on officers and leaders, because calls for service often involve relatives, neighbours, former classmates, community members, or families with long-standing ties.

A trauma- and healing-informed approach is therefore essential to the current state of First Nations policing. Trauma-informed policing means recognizing that a person's behaviour during crisis may be shaped by personal trauma, family disruption, colonization, residential schools, child welfare involvement, violence, grief, addiction, poverty, or repeated negative experiences with systems. It also means understanding that the officer may be carrying occupational trauma and community trauma at the same time. A healing-informed approach goes further by asking how policing can help restore safety, dignity, connection, and community wellness rather than responding only through enforcement.

The examples raised in the topic and purpose section show that First Nations police services are actively building their own solutions. Community input into police vehicles, artwork, language use, smudging spaces, elder involvement, culturally appropriate death-scene protocols, and local training all demonstrate that policing can reflect community identity. These practices are not symbolic extras. They help community members feel recognized, reduce fear, support communication, and remind officers that their authority must remain connected to responsibility, respect, and service. They also help partner agencies understand that public safety in First Nations communities must make space for ceremony, family, grief, and cultural protocol.

The current state of policing also shows the importance of governance. Boards and commissions must be able to explain these realities to funding partners, political leadership, and the public. They must advocate for the resources required to maintain safe service levels while also protecting the cultural and relational strengths that make First Nations policing effective. Governance bodies can help ensure that services are not measured only by enforcement outputs, but also by community trust, officer wellness, cultural responsiveness, crisis follow-up, prevention work, and the ability to maintain meaningful presence in the community.

The larger takeaway is that First Nations policing is not a lesser form of policing; it is a model that can teach the broader policing system about relationship, culture, humility, accountability, and community-defined safety. At the same time, First Nations services should not have to rely on dedication, sacrifice, and creativity to compensate for inequitable funding and structural neglect. The current state of policing requires honest acknowledgement of under-resourcing, but it also requires recognition of the leadership already being shown by First Nations officers, Chiefs, boards, commissions, elders, knowledge keepers, and communities who continue to build policing systems rooted in care, responsibility, and self-determination.

## Topic & Purpose

1. Panel on First Nations Policing Challenges, focused on current realities, strengths, and community-driven solutions in First Nations policing across Canada.
2. Intended audience: people who did not attend but need a clear sense of issues and promising practices.

## Current State of Policing in First Nations

1. First Nations communities expect the same standards as other Canadians: visibility, timely response, accountability, safety.
2. Many services face severe under-resourcing:
3. Remote and seasonally inaccessible communities.
4. Officers frequently working alone, with limited backup and poor infrastructure (e.g., spotty cell coverage).
5. Major incidents (homicides, serious drug cases) pull officers off general patrol for long periods, leaving services more reactive than proactive.
6. A substantial number of First Nations still lack adequate or dedicated policing, and funding often arrives only after crises or tragedies.

## Community-Driven, Culturally Grounded Practices

1. Policing described as relationship-based, not authority-based.
2. Many officers police their own communities, bringing:
3. Knowledge of language, customs, ceremonies, and family networks.
4. Ability to de-escalate using culturally appropriate approaches (e.g., offering smudge, making space for prayers and goodbyes at death scenes).
5. Services increasingly reflect community identity:
6. Community input into police car design and artwork in offices and cell blocks.
7. Use of Indigenous languages in greetings and daily interactions.
8. Access to smudging, elders, and cultural supports for both community members and officers.
9. Officers often act as bridges with other systems (paramedics, coroners, hospitals), pushing those systems to “hurry up and slow down” to respect cultural protocols.

## Trauma- and Healing-Informed Approaches

1. Recognition of intergenerational trauma and higher violent crime rates in many First Nations communities.
2. Despite this, First Nations services report lower use of force, credited to:
3. Long-term relationships and trust.
4. Trauma-informed, culturally aware responses.
5. Continuity (the same officer may respond, follow up, and support the family).
6. Growing emphasis on in-house, locally developed training:
7. Micro-credential courses on local history, colonialism, and community context.
8. Training shared with partner agencies (e.g., sheriffs) working in First Nations.
9. Involvement of knowledge keepers and elders to teach about colonization, current social conditions, and trauma-informed practice, with proper recognition and compensation.

## Unique Pressures and Strengths of First Nations Officers and Leaders

### *Strengths:*

1. Deep personal investment: many live in the communities they serve; their families depend on the service.
2. Shared lived experience (residential schools, day schools, colonization) builds empathy and credibility with community members.
3. Strong motivation to ensure policing supports cultural revitalization, language, and community safety.

### *Pressures:*

1. Investigations and tragedies can feel highly personal, especially when victims are known or related.
2. Officers' families sometimes experience secondary impacts (stigma, tension).
3. Leaders carry ongoing responsibility to fight for equitable funding, wages, and pensions, so people do not have to leave First Nations services to be treated fairly.

**Supports include:**

1. Mental health and peer support programs for officers and civilian staff.
2. Regular access to elders, ceremonies, and cultural spaces as part of wellness.
3. Deliberate efforts to balance community work with being present for family and children.

**Overall Message**

1. First Nations police services are delivering innovative, culturally grounded, and community-centered policing with far fewer resources than mainstream services.
2. They demonstrate a model based on:
3. Relationships over authority
4. Cultural respect over rigid procedure
5. Community-defined priorities over imposed models

The panel emphasized that policing must remain rooted in the understanding that without the community, there is no need for the service, and that presence—in ceremony, in crisis, and in everyday life—is at the heart of First Nations policing.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

## Future Directions: Hope for First Nations Police Governance

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Moderator: Micayla B. Hayes, FNP GC Committee Member, CAPG Board member

Panellists: Teddy Manywounds, Chair, FNP GC

Keith Blake, Chief of Police, Tosguna Tsuut'ina Nation Police services

Dale Cox, Executive Advisor Lake Shore First Nations Police Service

### Discussion context and rationale

The hope for First Nations police governance is rooted in a future where First Nations policing is no longer dependent on temporary program administration, narrow contribution agreements, or recurring negotiations that leave communities uncertain about whether basic public safety needs will be met. The aspiration is for First Nations policing to become a structural guarantee: a recognized, stable, and legally supported public safety system that reflects First Nations rights, laws, cultures, leadership, and community-defined priorities. This future would move beyond treating First Nations policing as an enhancement or discretionary initiative and instead recognize it as an essential service that must be supported with the same seriousness, permanence, and operational expectation as policing elsewhere in Canada.

The current program-based model has required First Nations leaders, public safety professionals, service members, boards, commissions, and Chiefs of Police to spend too much time defending the need for policing that should already be understood as fundamental. Rather than focusing fully on long-term safety planning, prevention, officer wellness, recruitment, training, technology, infrastructure, and cultural service delivery, many leaders are forced into cycles of proposal writing, renewal deadlines, funding uncertainty, and advocacy for parity. The future being worked toward is one where those leaders can plan with confidence, build durable institutions, and focus on community safety outcomes instead of repeatedly proving that First Nations communities deserve equitable policing.

A structural guarantee would mean that governance is not an afterthought. It would recognize boards, commissions, police authorities, and other First Nations oversight bodies as essential institutions that require training, administrative support, policy tools, legal clarity, and stable resources. These governance bodies are responsible for ensuring that policing remains accountable to the community while protecting operational independence. They create the space where community concerns, leadership priorities, police realities, budgets, cultural expectations, and accountability measures can be brought together. Without strong governance, First Nations policing can become vulnerable to political instability, unclear roles, under-resourcing, and external decision-making that does not reflect the community's lived reality.

The aspirations being advanced by First Nations police governance leaders are practical and achievable. They include stable multi-year or permanent funding arrangements, equitable per-officer resourcing, wage and pension parity, sufficient staffing levels, reliable dispatch and communications, safe facilities, access to training seats, specialized investigative capacity, mental health and wellness supports, data systems, and the ability to develop proactive community safety initiatives. These are not luxuries. They are the basic building blocks required for Chiefs of Police and service members to provide safe, effective, culturally grounded policing while meeting professional standards and community expectations.

This work is also about restoring authority and responsibility to First Nations communities. First Nations leadership and governance bodies are not asking for policing to be separate from accountability; they are asking for accountability to be built in the right place. A future structural model would respect First Nations self-determination by ensuring that communities have a real role in defining safety priorities, appointing and training governance members, shaping policy, embedding culture and language, determining community engagement expectations, and holding the police service accountable to local values and outcomes. In this way, governance becomes a practical expression of self-determination rather than a procedural requirement attached to a funding agreement.

The hoped-for future is also one where the sacrifice of service men and women is properly recognized. First Nations officers often police in places where they know the families, histories, trauma, grief, strengths, and pressures of the community. They respond not only as professionals, but often as relatives, neighbours, language carriers, cultural participants, and role models. Structural recognition would help ensure that these officers are not expected to carry inequitable systems on personal commitment alone. They should have the same access to compensation, pensions, equipment, supervision, backup, specialized support, and wellness care as other police professionals, while also being supported to deliver policing that is grounded in culture, humility, relationship, and community responsibility.

For Chiefs of Police, a structural guarantee would create the stability needed to lead strategically rather than reactively. Chiefs would be better positioned to plan succession, develop future leaders, build specialty units, invest in prevention, support officer wellness, maintain standards, and report meaningfully to their boards and communities. They would also be better able to participate as equal public safety partners with municipal, provincial, federal, and Indigenous policing organizations. This would help shift the conversation from survival and renewal to excellence, innovation, partnership, and long-term community safety.

The broader aspiration is that the next stage of First Nations police governance will allow communities to move from challenge-based conversations to progress-based conversations. This means arriving at future gatherings able to speak about improved legislation, stable funding, trained and supported boards, stronger national networks, shared data, officer wellness, successful recruitment, cultural revitalization, and measurable improvements in community safety. It also means continuing to build relationships with governments and partners while insisting that acknowledgment, empathy, and dialogue must lead to commitments, timelines, and accountable action.

Ultimately, the hope is for First Nations policing to be understood as a permanent part of public safety in this country, not a temporary program that must be renegotiated into existence. It is a vision of policing where communities are safer because governance is local, civilian, trained, and respected; where officers are supported and valued; where Chiefs of Police can lead with confidence; where First Nations leadership can exercise authority without carrying all liability alone; and where future generations inherit public safety systems that reflect who they are, where they come from, and the responsibility to care for one another.

**Panellists stressed that effective governance begins with meeting communities where they are:**

1. Creating safe spaces to listen to community concerns and frustrations
2. Being transparent about barriers like lack of dispatch, underfunding, and systemic constraints
3. Explaining the reasons behind decisions to reduce anger, build trust, and strengthen legitimacy

**A key theme was the need for a symbiotic relationship between governance bodies and police services:**

1. Commissions and chiefs working as a team rather than as “boss and employee”
2. Open dialogue and information-sharing so that commissioners, leadership, and officers are aligned on priorities
3. Governance as a conduit to the community, able to answer questions and provide context that the service alone cannot

### **Speakers highlighted accountability and transparency as core governance practices:**

1. Sharing difficult information internally and with the community instead of hiding problems
2. Acknowledging issues like pay inequity, underfunding, and discriminatory practices, and inviting staff and community to be part of the solution
3. Using policy as an “anchor of accountability” that reflects local culture, ceremony, and wellness needs (e.g., budget lines for traditional practices)

### **There was strong emphasis on essential service designation and equity:**

1. First Nations policing should be recognized and funded as an essential service, comparable to other police services
2. Equity was described not as giving everyone the same thing, but providing the “right size of moccasins” — supports that truly fit First Nations communities
3. Participants called for pay parity, pensions, and resources that match the risks and responsibilities officers carry

### **The panel framed First Nations policing as a model of community-centered policing:**

1. First Nations services were described as achieving high approval in their communities and setting examples for broader policing in Canada
2. One service has already been asked to police a nearby non-Indigenous community, demonstrating confidence in the model and its wider potential

### **Speakers called for bolder advocacy and concrete action from governments and partners:**

1. Acknowledgment and empathy are no longer sufficient; there must be timelines, commitments, and follow-through on funding and legislative change
2. Participants urged attendees to share what they heard with chiefs, councils, elected officials and to press them: what will you do, when, and how will we know?

### **Looking ahead two years, the panel hoped for:**

1. A shift from talking mainly about challenges to celebrating progress and possibilities
2. Clear, realistic goals with measurable improvements in funding, equity, and community safety
3. A stronger national network of First Nations policing services and commissions, sharing initiatives, data, and best practices

## **The discussion closed with messages of hope, resilience, and responsibility to future generations:**

1. Encouragement to remain tenacious, humble, and grounded in community care
2. A vision of leaving the world better than it was found, planting seeds so that grandchildren and great-grandchildren can thrive
3. A reminder that everyone in this work is “holding each other’s hands, walking each other home,” and should take the opportunities that past generations were denied.

## **Next steps and opportunities**

The next steps and opportunities emerging from this report begin with a simple truth that has been carried by First Nations communities for generations: public safety and policing services exist for the benefit of the collective. Care of the community has always been understood as a collective responsibility among First Nations peoples. Long before contemporary policing structures, First Nations communities maintained ways of governing conduct, resolving conflict, protecting vulnerable people, restoring balance, and ensuring that families, children, elders, and future generations were cared for. Modern First Nations police governance should be understood as a continuation of that responsibility, adapted to today’s legal, operational, and public safety environment.

A key opportunity is to continue strengthening First Nations police governance as a place where community care, operational accountability, and political advocacy can meet. Boards, commissions, and police authorities should be supported as permanent civic institutions, not temporary administrative requirements attached to funding agreements. This means investing in governance training, onboarding, policy development, strategic planning, financial literacy, cultural leadership, conflict-of-interest rules, and clear role definitions between governance, Chief and Council, senior administration, and the Chief of Police. Strong governance allows communities to ask difficult questions, support police leadership, protect operational independence, and ensure that policing remains rooted in community-defined priorities.

Another next step is coordinated advocacy for First Nations policing to be recognized as an essential service and structural guarantee. The report repeatedly shows that program-based policing does not fully support the objectives of First Nations leadership, public safety professionals, service members, women and men in uniform, civilian staff, governance bodies, and Chiefs of Police. Stable public safety cannot depend on short-term renewals, delayed agreements, restricted eligible expenses, or funding that only responds after tragedy. First Nations police services require predictable and equitable resources for staffing, wages, pensions, training, dispatch, facilities, vehicles, communications, specialized units, data systems, and member wellness.

There is also an opportunity to build stronger networks between First Nations police services, municipal police services, RCMP detachments, provincial ministries, federal partners, Indigenous organizations, friendship centres, and health, housing, education, and social service systems. Many First Nations, Indigenous, and Inuit people move between home communities, rural areas, northern regions, and urban centres for education, work, family, housing, health care, and safety. Public safety systems must therefore be connected across jurisdictions. Shared protocols for missing persons, domestic violence, death notifications, mental health crisis response, addictions, youth safety, human trafficking, encampments, and organized crime recruitment can help ensure that people are not lost between systems.

The report also points to the need for trauma-informed and healing-informed practice across all policing services that serve First Nations, Indigenous, and Inuit people. This includes First Nations police services, municipal services, provincial agencies, and the RCMP. Training must move beyond awareness and become visible in daily practice: how officers speak to people in crisis, how they involve elders and knowledge keepers, how they slow down during grief and death investigations, how they recognize the impacts of residential schools, child welfare, forced displacement, racism, poverty, addictions, and intergenerational trauma, and how they avoid re-creating harm through unnecessary escalation or dismissive responses. Trauma-informed policing is not separate from accountability; it is a pathway to safer, more respectful, and more effective accountability.

Future opportunities should also focus on building practical capacity. First Nations services need support to recruit and retain officers, develop local training pathways, create succession plans, protect officer wellness, build specialized investigative capacity, strengthen technology and communications, and develop culturally grounded prevention programs. Governance bodies can support this by documenting service gaps, collecting community input, using data responsibly, preparing business cases, and reporting progress back to the community. These steps help transform advocacy from general concern into evidence-based planning that governments and partners can respond to with clear commitments.

Ceremony, language, culture, and community presence should remain central to each next step. These elements are not symbolic additions to policing; they are part of how trust, safety, and legitimacy are built. Police vehicles designed with community input, smudging spaces, Indigenous oaths, elders councils, language supports, culturally appropriate victim and death-scene protocols, youth engagement, and family-centred approaches all show that public safety can be delivered in ways that reflect First Nations identity and values. Strengthening these practices creates opportunities for policing to support healing, belonging, and prevention, not only enforcement.

Finally, the next stage of this work should be measured by accountability and follow-through. Future gatherings should be able to report on what changed: whether funding became more stable, whether governance bodies received training, whether officers gained pension and wage parity, whether dispatch and infrastructure improved, whether community engagement increased, whether trauma-informed practice became measurable, and whether First Nations people experienced greater safety and dignity in their interactions with police. The opportunity is to move from describing challenges to demonstrating progress. That progress must be collective, because the safety of the people is collective; it must be community-centred, because policing exists to serve the community; and it must be future-focused, because today's governance decisions will shape the public safety systems inherited by children, grandchildren, and generations still to come.

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