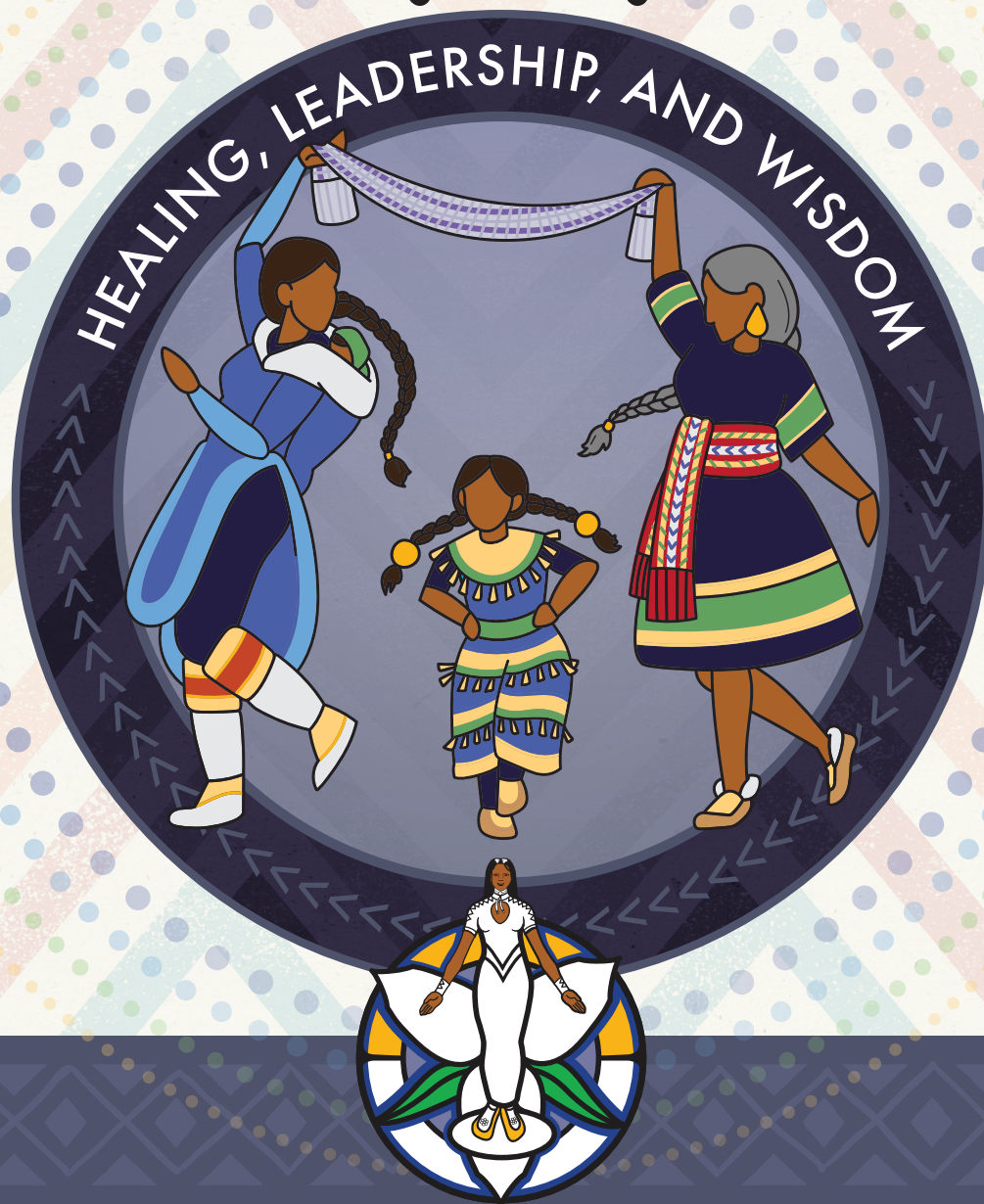


ANNUAL REPORT

2024 - 2025

Walking Together



Ontario Native Women's Association

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President's Message

I am honoured to share reflections on behalf of the Board of Directors in this year's annual report. The past year underscored the strength of ONWA's

governance, staff and broader community. As Indigenous women, our leadership is not about structure – it's about upholding our relationships, our responsibilities, and our cultural teachings. We walk together with shared accountability, intergenerational strength, and collective care for each other and the roles we hold.

In 2024-25, we welcomed new Board members and new Board leadership to our circle. Our work as a Board is to walk alongside ONWA's CEO and staff – those doing the daily work to support Indigenous women to take up their leadership roles in their families, communities and Nations. The foundational work of the Board is in our role as caretakers of the ONWA's vision and strategic plan. I am proud to share that ONWA continued to make significant progress this past year in achieving our strategic goals. Our Strategic Picture, and ONWA's vision, ensure our organizational direction remains aligned with our teachings and what Indigenous women have told us they want and need in order to be well and safe.

The past year was also marked by growth and an unwavering commitment to Indigenous women's leadership. I was honoured to be part of the development of new relationships with Indigenous women in other parts of the world. Learning from, and sharing with, each other is an opportunity to build solidarity and amplifying the voices of Indigenous women in community and globally. These relationships and our ability to walk together is especially important during times of challenge. We continue to see the rise of anti-rights narratives that seek to silence Indigenous voices. Our leadership and solidarity with each other is critical and is needed now more than ever.

As we look ahead, I would like to recommit to holding space for that leadership, to nurturing it with care and integrity, and to ensuring that as an organization, we continue to respond boldly and with heart.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we thank ONWA's CEO and the staff. Let us continue to walk together.

Chi-Miigwetch,
Melinda Commanda



CEO's Message

As we reflect on the past year, we navigated a number of challenges as an agency. Despite these barriers, we continued to be grounded in culture and committed to our mandate to support Indigenous

women. When addressing system change, we must remember to stay true to our vision - while the systems of oppression are strong, when we, as Indigenous women, stand up based on our values and commitment to make change for our grandchildren's grandchildren, we will prevail. I am proud to celebrate the strengths of our Elders, youth, and all the leaders in the ONWA community who continue to overcome the challenges to uplift Indigenous women everyday.

In 2024-25, ONWA made incredible strides to advance our programs, strengthen our services, and deepen our impact for Indigenous women and their families. From frontline support for Indigenous women experiencing violence, to land-based healing rooted in our cultural teachings, to youth leadership initiatives grounded in Indigenous women's ways of knowing and being, ONWA's work continues to be led by Indigenous women's voices and the needs of community.

Over the past year, ONWA has ensured that Indigenous women's issues have been at the forefront of local, regional, national and international conversations, centering Indigenous women's inherent rights and experiences. Our work and our advocacy is not only influencing policy and legislation, but it is sparking dialogue at all levels of government.

This past year has not been without its challenges - from the rise of anti-rights movements and anti-Indigenous racism, to navigating changing governments and government priorities – these challenges are felt across ONWA and in our communities. Our collective leadership is not just important, it is essential in these times.

Indigenous women and their families carry stories of strength, resilience, and cultural pride that have endured for generations. Despite facing systemic barriers, colonial legacies, and ongoing challenges related to health, safety, and access to resources, Indigenous women continue to lead the way in reclaiming traditional roles, advocating for their communities, and nurturing the next generation. From remote northern communities to urban centres, Indigenous women are entrepreneurs, caregivers, knowledge keepers, and leaders, working tirelessly to create safer, healthier futures for their families

As we look towards the future, we continue our commitment to taking up our leadership and walking together. In this way, through every challenge, we continue to rise – guided by generations of strong Indigenous women's leadership, resilience and sacred knowledge. Together, we are healing. Together, we are leading. Together, we are honouring the wisdom of our ancestors.

Chi Miigwetch. Matna, Mersee, Nai:wen to ONWA members, staff and all those in community.

Cora McGuire-Cyrette



Organizational Structure

Our Vision

At the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA), we celebrate and honour the safety and healing of Indigenous women and girls as they take up their leadership roles in the family, community and internationally for generations to come.

About Us

ONWA is the oldest and largest Indigenous women’s organization in Canada, established as a not-for-profit organization in 1971 to empower and support all Indigenous women and their families, regardless of their status or locality, through research, advocacy, policy development and culturally grounded programs. ONWA has over 50 years of experience and expertise in amplifying Indigenous women’s voices and advocating for solutions created and led by Indigenous women.

ONWA is unique as an organization, and our operating model reflects our wholistic approach to restoring Indigenous women’s rights and leadership. ONWA is:

- an association with 16 Chapters (incorporated Indigenous women’s organizations providing front-line services) and 23 Councils (grassroots Indigenous women’s groups supporting community development models).
- a research and policy advocacy organization and,

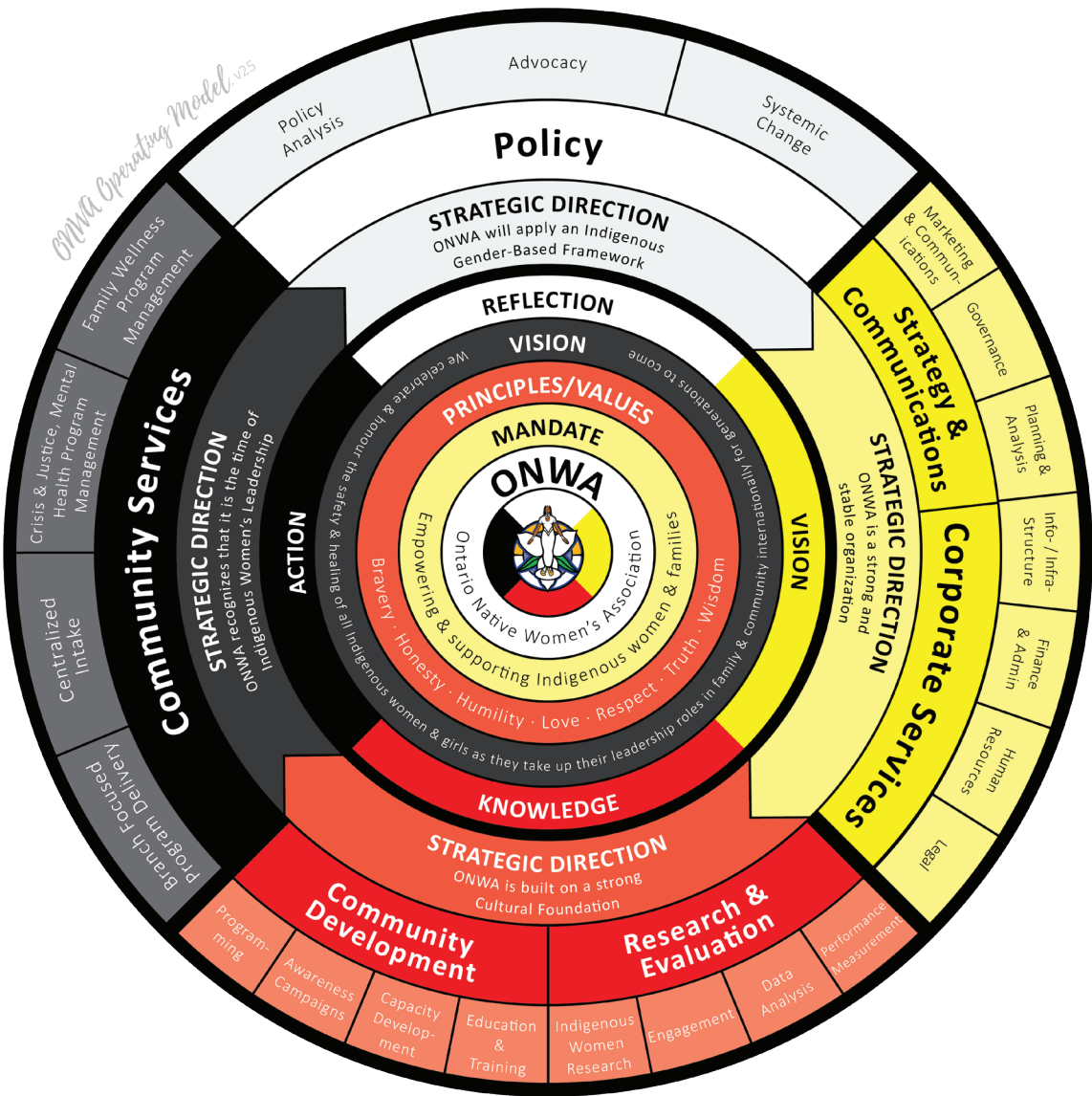
- a direct, front-line service provider delivering 80 programs and projects across the lifecycle for Indigenous women, girls and Two Spirit people along with their families in 26 sites across Ontario.

ONWA is mandated to end all forms of violence against Indigenous women, and the safety of Indigenous women is central to ONWA’s research, advocacy, policy and program development. ONWA’s work is guided and directed by nine strategic issues identified by Indigenous women as integral to their safety and wellbeing: Mother Earth, Family Violence, Sexual Violence, Child Welfare, Human Trafficking, MMIWG, Housing and Homelessness, Justice, and Health.

ONWA’s 2024-25 annual report is organized by these nine strategic issues. We highlight key programs, members’ actions, and our advocacy to demonstrate the impact ONWA has on supporting Indigenous women’s safety, well-being and leadership.

Our Values

ONWA is committed to using a human rights framework for our work. As our foundation, we use the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This framework supports Indigenous women’s individual and collective rights to have their own agencies, to be directly and meaningfully engaged on issues that directly impact them and in the reclaiming of their leadership.



RECLAIM
Indigenous women’s role as matriarchs (leadership) in their families and communities.

RESTORE
Indigenous women’s identity and inherent rights beyond a jurisdictional approach.

RECONCILE
relationships to ensure that Indigenous women have a right to safety regardless of location.

RECOGNIZE
that Indigenous women are the medicine needed to heal ourselves, families, and communities.



ONWA Membership

16 CHAPTERS

Eastern Region

1. Biimaawzegin Regional Aboriginal Women's Circle (BRAWC)
2. Georgian Bay Native Women's Association
3. Lovesick Lake Native Women's Association
4. Minwaashin Lodge
5. Nakehndan: Knowing Your Truth
6. Nijkiwendidaa Anishnaabekwewag Services
7. Orillia Native Women's Group
8. Tyendinaga Native Women's Association

Southern region

9. Hamilton Wentworth Chapter of Native Women Inc.
10. Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
11. Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc.

Western region

12. Beendigen Inc.
13. Biidaajiwun Inc.
14. Kenora Anishinaabe-Kweg Aboriginal Women's Organization
15. Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle

Northern Region

- Anishnaabe Kateri Association

23 COUNCILS

Eastern Region

1. All Our Relations
2. Bawaating Anishnabekwewok
3. Indigenous Women On-Line
4. Kingston Thunder Women
5. Rainbow Women
6. Tyendinaga Native Women's Association
7. Waibejawong Anishnabequek
8. Wiikwemikong Anishnawbekwek

Southern region

9. Deshkan Zii Bi Indigenous Women's Association
10. Indigenous Women of Niagara
11. Métis Women's Circle

Western region

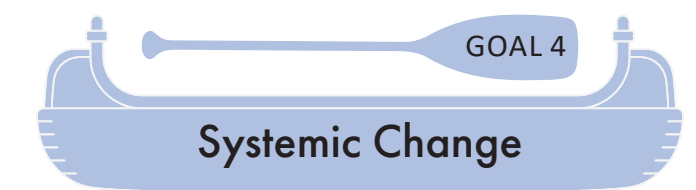
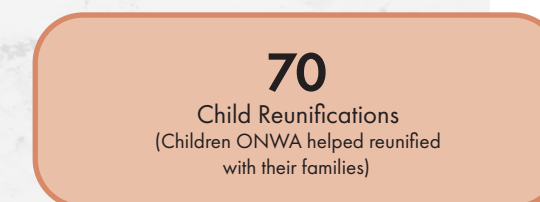
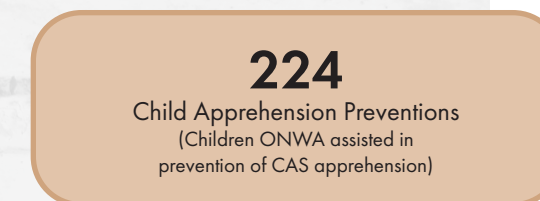
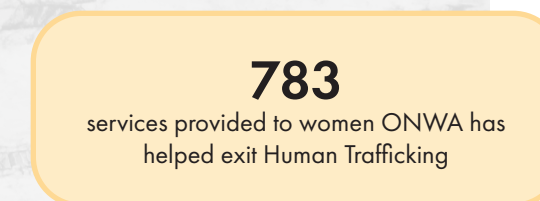
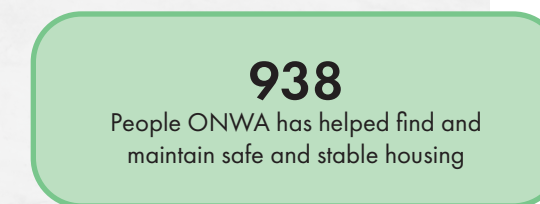
12. Grassy Narrows Women's Group
13. Mindemoyag Women's Group
14. Thunder Bay Council
15. Wabigoon Aboriginal Women's Group

Northern Region

16. Anishnaabe Kateri Association
17. Anishnabequek Timmins
18. Aroland Ladies of 242
19. Constance Lake Anishinawbe Quek
20. Ginoogaming First Nation Council
21. Mamowedew
22. New Post Women's Group
23. Rocky Bay Women's Council

A Year in Review

In 2024-25, we moved into the fourth year of our Strategic Picture 2021-2031. We are well on our way to achieving our overarching goal of becoming a Centre of Excellence, recognized nationally, and continuing our growth built on a strong cultural foundation. All of our work aligns with the four goals in our Strategic Picture, articulated by Indigenous women within our membership, the community and organization.



For more details read our Strategic Picture 2021-2031, available at onwa.ca/reports



Advocating for Systemic Change

ONWA remains steadfast in amplifying the voices of Indigenous women at the local, provincial, national, and international level to advance systemic change and restore our rightful place as leaders. Our Indigenous Gender Based Analysis (IGBA) and human rights framework continued to guide our analysis of policies and legislation with the potential to impact the lives of Indigenous women, their families, and their communities.

In 2024-25, ONWA's advocacy focused on holding all levels of government accountable for Indigenous women's inherent and human rights, including our right to safety, within a shifting political landscape. New and strengthened relationships with government and system partners brought new opportunities to influence. ONWA advocated for policy changes across all nine of our strategic issue areas to increase the safety, healing, and wholistic wellbeing of Indigenous women and girls, now and for generations to come.

In 2024-25, ONWA wrote 37 policy submissions to respond to and influence policy and legislation at the provincial, federal and international level and had over 71 meetings with governmental officials.

Intergovernmental Updates

Provincial Relationship Table

ONWA continued its Relationship Table with provincial inter-ministerial partners. The Table is co-led by ONWA and the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation, who coordinates representatives from across provincial ministries to discuss key issues of importance to Indigenous women. In 2024-25 discussion items included the need for capital investments in Indigenous women's healing and safety, approaches to housing and homelessness, and Indigenous women's human rights and how interministerial partners can uphold Indigenous women's human rights to protect their safety and promote their leadership.

Strengthening Relationships with Municipalities

In 2024-25, ONWA's CEO and senior leadership provided a number of presentations to mayors, councillors, municipal leaders and staff to build municipalities' understanding of their role in advancing Indigenous women's rights and

improving Indigenous women's safety. This included a presentation to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Joint Policing and Social Policy Taskforce in April, facilitating a concurrent session at the 2024 AMO Annual Conference in August, participating on a panel at the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) Community Safety Forum in September, and a plenary presentation at the 2024 OMSSA Policy Conference in December. ONWA discussed Indigenous women's unique experiences of violence and encouraged municipalities to work in partnership with Indigenous women's organizations in their localities to respond to the Calls for Justice from the MMIWG National Inquiry and support solutions led by Indigenous women.

Key to this work was ONWA's existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with AMO, and the development of a new MOU this year with OMSSA. This MOU signifies a first of its kind relationship between OMSSA and an Indigenous women's organization – a gap that is being filled through meaningful dialogue and actions that are mutually beneficial and have positive collective impacts

Building on our MOU with AMO, ONWA informed the development of their Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan that aims to identify policy and program actions to improve Indigenous-municipal relationships and provide tools and resources to support municipalities in building relationships with Indigenous organizations, communities and governments. ONWA supported virtual engagement sessions with ONWA members to ensure their voices are reflected in the Plan. ONWA has stressed that the Plan must speak to the unique needs of Indigenous women and provide guidance on how municipalities can advance Indigenous women's rights affirmed by UNDRIP, the TRC Calls to Action, and the MMIWG Calls for Justice.

National Advocacy through the Indigenous Women's Circle

In December 2024, ONWA's CEO was accepted for a second term to the national Indigenous Women's Circle (IWC). The IWC was established by Canada's Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) in 2018 to engage with Indigenous women leaders on the challenges they face and their priorities for the Government of Canada to advance gender equality. As a member, ONWA provides strategic advice and guidance to the Deputy Minister of (WAGE) to address the systemic inequalities that Indigenous women experience, with a particular focus on increasing women's economic security and prosperity, encouraging women's leadership and democratic participation, and ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Leveraging International Human Rights Mechanisms for Accountability at Home

In 2024-25, ONWA and members of ONWA's Board of Directors participated in key United Nations (UN) and international sessions. ONWA participates by meeting directly with UN officials and committee members, writing submissions with recommendations for action, providing pre-recorded video statements when we can't attend in person, hosting and participating in side events, and making oral interventions. After UN sessions, we continue to work domestically, in Canada, to advocate for implementation of the recommendations ONWA and the UN entities make to Canada. All of ONWA's international advocacy and messaging is informed by what we hear collectively from Indigenous women in community.

In 2024-25, ONWA participated in:

- The 69th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW69) –ONWA co-hosted a parallel event with the Māori Women’s Welfare League and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Women’s Association on the need for dedicated space by and for Indigenous women within the United Nation, and was a panelist on two other events on Indigenous women’s leadership and gender equality and empowerment. We also submitted a written statement calling for the Indigenous women leadership at all levels of decision making, and for sustainable, flexible and multiyear funding for Indigenous women’s organizations. Along with other Indigenous women’s organizations, ONWA also called for recognition of, and action on, the Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women

Did You Know?

The Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women was drafted in 1995 at the NGO Forum of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The Declaration and its 33 recommendations were developed by an Indigenous Women’s Caucus of over 150 Indigenous women from more than 30 countries to influence the official UN Platform for Action being negotiated by state delegations. Although it has never been adopted, it remains a milestone for the Indigenous Women’s movement across the world as it lays the foundations for our claims as Indigenous peoples and as women. Read ONWA’s paper on the [Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women](#).

- The 17th session of the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) - ONWA attend for the first time in 2024-25. We engaged in discussions with the Canadian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, made statements with recommendations to the EMRIP Committee and governments on upholding Indigenous women’s inherent leadership rights and ensuring Indigenous women and girls’ safety, and hosted a side event on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 39 on the rights of Indigenous women and girls, which included the former Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and an EMRIP committee member.
- EMRIP’s study on Indigenous Peoples’ right to data - ONWA prepared a submission for EMRIP that emphasized Indigenous women’s rights to their data across the data lifecycle, from generation to collection, interpretation, and dissemination. Our submission outlined the significant data gaps for Indigenous women in Canada and the lack of Indigenous women’s engagement in Indigenous data sovereignty and governance. ONWA advocated for Indigenous women’s leadership and inclusion in decision-making around data governance, as well as direct investments into Indigenous women’s organizations, and the need to safeguard data collection practices that uphold the principles and intent of UNDRIP. ONWA’s submission and recommendations were cited in EMRIP’s final study report.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee’s tenth review of Canada - CEDAW obligates governments to take measures to combat discrimination and promote women’s rights. Governments are regularly reviewed by CEDAW on their

progress. ONWA developed a submission and met with CEDAW members to call for greater inclusion of Indigenous women in decision making, and increased focus and action to uphold Indigenous women’s rights and safety. As a result, several of ONWA’s recommendations were directly included in the CEDAW Committee’s Concluding Observations (final report) to Canada.

- The 57th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) - ONWA participated in the 57th session virtually, through pre-recorded statements, and submitted two written statements, one on Indigenous women and Mother Earth, and another on Indigenous women survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.
- The second HRC intersessional meeting on enhanced participation of Indigenous Peoples, took place to inform decision making on concrete ways to enhance Indigenous Peoples participation in the HRC and the UN. ONWA made oral statements to the HRC about ensuring Indigenous women have access to and are involved in decision making.

The 70th National Conference of the Māori Women’s Welfare League (MWWL) - ONWA and the MWWL signed the Manaakitanga and Gizhewaadizi Agreement, which is the first of its kind, marking a commitment to work together for the empowerment of Indigenous women and girls worldwide. ONWA also participated on a leadership panel discussing the importance of Indigenous women in decision-making roles. Building relationships across nations empowers our voices and our leadership. We are not just learning from each other—we are reclaiming our power as Indigenous peoples.

Read our submission, as well as our joint submission with the Indian Act Sex Discrimination Working Group here: tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download





Strategic Program Updates

Urban Indigenous Data Leadership Initiative

The Urban Indigenous Data Leadership Initiative (UIDLI), co-led by ONWA and a dedicated Working Group comprising partners such as the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition, Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario, Beendigen, and Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg, works to advance community-led approaches to data governance that centre Indigenous knowledge systems, promote data sovereignty, and support systemic change. In 2024-25, ONWA completed the scoping and planning phase to enhance data and outcomes, strengthen culturally rooted practices, bolster data capacity and develop preliminary recommendations to support the development of an Urban Indigenous Data Governance Framework. The project approach is grounded in the perspectives, lived realities, and experiences of urban Indigenous Peoples in Ontario. Core to this work is the recognition that data holds the power to shape narratives, affirm community strengths, and support healing and transformation when led by Indigenous Peoples and rooted in their knowledge systems.

Centralized Intake Program

ONWA's Centralized Intake (CI) program provides immediate support, brief intervention, case management, and referrals at point of contact through one toll-free number. The CI program continued to respond to the evolving needs of the community by expanding a province wide network of services, while reducing wait-times, streamlining referrals, and addressing service gaps. In 2024-25 there was a 7% increase in intakes, and over 8,000 immediate needs supported.

Trusted Sources – Indigenous Registration Administrator Program

The Trusted Sources - Indigenous Registration Administrator (IRA) program operates in five (5) ONWA sites: Thunder Bay, Hamilton, Ottawa, Sioux Lookout, and Timmins. This program was developed to support community members to obtain, renew, and/or update their Indigenous family status. In 2024-2025, the program supported 392 applications to be submitted; facilitated 15 clinics, and completed 629 intakes. As a result, many community members have expressed that now that they have their status, they feel more connected to their community as First Nation Peoples.

"Thought he would never get through the paperwork to get his card."

"Grateful and happy that the worker can support to her at her home as she is a very busy mom looking after her children, with little help."

30th Anniversary of the Indigenous Healing and Wellness Strategy (IHWS)

In partnership with MCCSS, ONWA organized and hosted a two-day conference in recognition of the IHWS' 30th anniversary. The conference centred on the theme "Intergenerational Healing: A Journey of Strength and Resilience." Approximately 300 participants, including frontline workers, program managers, and leaders from 53 government agencies, organizations and First Nations across Ontario came together to share knowledge, strengthen relationships and celebrate the collective progress of Indigenous wellness initiatives.

The event included impactful teachings, discussions and panels from Elders, keynote speakers and youth, and a wide range of breakout sessions on topics from anti-human trafficking and trauma-informed care to land-based teachings and Indigenous astronomy.



Mother Earth

ONWA recognizes the traditional and inherent rights of Indigenous women as water carriers and caretakers of their traditional lands and waterways. ONWA members have called on us, through resolutions, to advocate for the rights of Mother Earth, increase awareness of the impacts of extractive industries and legislation, and develop resources to support communities’ capacity to take action. ONWA is invested in the protection of Mother Earth, as ONWA knows that the wellness of the land is linked to the wellness of Indigenous women and their families, now and for future generations

Program Highlights

ONWA’s Cultural Program

ONWA’s Cultural Program supports the healing journeys of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Peoples through traditional health and wellness practices, land-based learning, language revitalization, ceremony, community events, and collaborative program development. These initiatives are carried out in collaboration with ONWA programs, membership, and community partners. Rooted in seasonal activities guided by the 13 Grandmother Moon Cycles and the 7 Sacred Grandfather Teachings, the Cultural Program helps ONWA sites, staff and communities prepare for and take up their roles and responsibilities throughout the year. The Program strengthens connections to all living things and emphasizes the importance of preserving traditional knowledge and ways of being, ensuring that cultural teachings and practices are carried forward for future generations.

In 2024-25, the Cultural Program supported:

- 159 Individuals supported through Traditional Healing pathways
- 72 land-based initiatives, ceremonies and teachings delivered
- 3,010 individuals participated in programs of healing and wellness



Good News Story:

Niibin (late summer), Manoomin Experience

The Cultural Program offered a traditional land-based activity “Harvesting Manoomin” in the fall of 2024. Community members learned the spiritual protocols and traditional practices of how to gather/harvest and process manoomin (wild rice). They learned how to make the tools used to harvest, the method to harvest and the steps needed to process the harvested rice into the final product. This program provided participants the opportunity to connect to the water, land, and learn about the relationship, history of the Anishinaabe and the importance of manoomin. This cultural practice provided profound healing for participants, awakening their blood memory and deepening their spiritual connection to the plants, water, and our ancestors. One of the community members stated that she received healing and faced her fears of being on the water. She connected to the manoomin plant and will never forget this powerful experience.

National Day of Truth and Reconciliation Seeds

As part of the activities commemorating the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation on September 30th, ONWA partnered with the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority to distribute non-invasive seed packages. Sixteen (16) Chapters each received 50 packs of seeds to support community planting initiatives. These seeds were paired with a digital information pamphlet that highlighted the similarities between cultivating a nourishing garden and healing work and the history of the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. Pamphlets were provided in a printable format for membership to print and use in their own programming.

Membership Highlights

Mother Earth Day Clean up Contest for Membership

To celebrate Mother Earth Day, ONWA hosted a Community Cleanup Contest for membership. Thirteen (13) chapters received cleaning supplies to support a cleanup event in their communities. Chapters were encouraged to host a cleanup event in their community for the opportunity to win a prize to support a community eco-friendly initiative. The Orillia Native Women’s Association won the contest and used their funds to support their community garden initiative.

A Hard-Fought Victory for Grassy Narrows

Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek (Grassy Narrows First Nation) celebrated a hard-fought victory – the groundbreaking of a long-promised specialized medical care facility for those suffering from mercury poisoning. This milestone highlights the tireless efforts of the community including ONWA Council, the Grassy Narrows Women’s Group, to address the intergenerational impact of mercury contamination in Grassy Narrows. ONWA honours the leadership and strength of land and water defenders and recognizes there is still much work to be done.





Advocacy Highlights

Ontario's Updated Land Use Planning and Development Policy Framework

In May 2024, ONWA provided feedback on Ontario's proposed Updated Provincial Planning Statement. The Provincial Planning Statement provides province-wide policy direction on land use planning and development - all municipal and planning board decisions must be consistent with this statement. ONWA recommended that planning policies address the unique needs and priorities of Indigenous women and explicitly highlight their status as a priority population, account for the implications of infrastructure development on Indigenous women's safety and adequately protect Mother Earth. Indigenous women must see their needs and priorities reflected within all land use planning and development decisions.

Honouring the Water and Water Walkers

ONWA was proud to support Canada Post's unveiling of a commemorative stamp in honour of the remarkable life and enduring legacy of Josephine Mandamin. Josephine Mandamin, fondly remembered as Grandmother Water Walker, dedicated her life to protecting the waters and advocating for Indigenous rights and environmental conservation. Alongside Canada Post, ONWA had the honour to celebrate the profound impact Josephine has had on Indigenous communities, Mother Earth and the broader Canadian society.

To honour the water, on World Water Day, ONWA also developed the Hummingbird Teaching Card, a small post card that serves as a call to action and commitment on what community members will do to protect the water and 'how they will fill their copper pail'

Family Violence

Family violence as experienced by Indigenous women is an intersectional issue rooted in colonialism and targeted assimilation policies in Canada, which severed Indigenous women from their identities, cultures, and communities. Reclaiming Indigenous women's identity, leadership, traditional roles and responsibilities is the pathway to restoring balance and safety in our families and communities.

Program Highlights

Babaamendam – Trauma Informed Program

The Trauma Informed Program offers Indigenous women, youth, and their family's access to traditional healing, ceremony, balanced self-care and wellness, and activities that foster safe spaces. Guided by a "walk with" approach, the program supports long term healing, cultural connectedness, and the reclamation of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Over the past year, the Trauma Informed Program delivered 352 services, including direct linkages to community members, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and ceremony through wrap-around supports, referrals and co-care plans.

Community Wellness Program

The Community Wellness Program specializes in supporting Indigenous women and youth as they navigate domestic violence systems, offering individualized support for healing and wellness. In 2024-25, the Community Wellness Program continued to implement targeted initiatives to support individuals experiencing codependency and violence, with a focus on prevention and healing. One initiative, the Sacred Tree - Creating Balance, supported community members to understand cycles of abuse, promoted healing, and addressed risk through a prevention-focused and culturally grounded approach. In 2024-25, the Community Wellness Program delivered:

- Prevention-based services to 72 individuals
- 142 cultural interventions
- 73 specialized workshops

Good News Story: Community Wellness Program leads to Peer Support

Participants in the Community Wellness Program have taken meaningful steps toward their healing journeys by forming a peer-based support network. Their healing journeys have evolved into a shared experience that continues to support healing for themselves and the community. By empowering community members to support one another, the program is contributing to long-term wellness, collective healing, and community connection.

"Chi miigwetch, for the turtle that was in the bundle I recently won. I lead a woman's healing circle in our community and tonight we finished the healing turtle.

So much love, laughter and healing happened as we worked together on it, we did use medicines that I harvested from my own medicine garden, to give it a personal touch. Our elders in their late 70s can no longer sew, but contributed by stuffing our turtle. We have now smudged our healing turtle and can't wait to share her with the rest of the group next week. From all of us, thank you for the healing. Next month we hope to use the story dice, I really think this will help jog some memories in our elders of times gone by." – Community Member

IRS Wellness Video series and bundles

In 2023-2024, ONWA launched a 13-part wellness video series to support Indian Residential School survivors and their families. In 2024-25, ONWA updated this series, adding five additional videos. The new videos focus on promoting traditional knowledge transmission, art therapy and self-care. To complement the series, 50 additional wellness bundles were created and distributed to community members across Ontario. Each bundle included culturally grounded and practical wellness tools such as a drum kit, healing turtle kit, mini-smudge kit, flashlight, ONWA Affirmation Deck, Legend of the Four Winds dice game, cedar bough activity, ONWA colouring book and sustainable, plastic-free watercolour paint kit.

Good News Story:
Stories of Strength

For National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, ONWA asked community members to share their stories of strengths and resilience. The stories were shared and highlighted across our social media platforms to highlight the powerful gifts, spirit and perseverance of Indigenous people. Stories of Strength reached 7240 number of people.

Membership Highlights

Breaking Free from Family Violence Program

The Breaking Free from Family Violence program is hosted by seven (7) Chapters and three (3) ONWA sites: **Sunset Women’s Aboriginal Circle** in Sioux Lookout, **Niagara Chapter of Native Women**, **Native Women’s Resource Centre of Toronto**, **Hamilton-Wentworth Chapter of**

Native Women, **Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association** in Penetanguishene, **Beendigen, Inc** in Thunder Bay, **Orillia Native Women’s Group** and in ONWA’s Timmins, Kenora and Ottawa sites. By offering prevention, intervention, and aftercare support, the program fosters safety, healing, and long-term wellness for families impacted by violence

Chapters hosting the BFFV program supported 579 families through family violence prevention activities over the past year. In 2024-25, Chapters delivering the BFFV program reported:

- 30 families and 49 children were successfully reunified
- 96 families were supported in preventing involvement with child welfare services, helping to keep 224 children from apprehension
- A total of 101 women who had experienced violence and involvement with CAS were supported through unification and reunification efforts, alongside 25 other caregivers who received similar support.

Talk4Healing Crisis Line Initiative

ONWA Chapter, **Beendigen Inc**, and ONWA developed cultural and crisis response service standards and best practices for staff and community when contacting the Talk4Healing (T4H) crisis line. This foundational work created a starting point to guide the development and growth of an Indigenous women’s crisis line rooted in cultural safety, care and accountability as Beendigen Inc. further develops their cultural standards for best practices.

“You gave me confidence to start again and to be [stronger] with boundaries. Also, have educated me a lot about my value and what is and is not acceptable to be treated. I am grateful for the genuine care and support you have provided us. Miigwetch” – BFFV Community Member Feedback to Hamilton-Wentworth Chapter of Native Women



Advocacy Highlights

Standing Committee Study on Intimate Partner Violence

In July 2024, ONWA’s CEO provided oral testimony to the Ontario Standing Committee on Justice Policy study on intimate partner violence. ONWA’s oral evidence and written submission emphasized that Indigenous women’s experiences of violence are unique and distinct from non-Indigenous women, and rooted in colonization and systemic anti-Indigenous racism, sexism and discrimination. ONWA noted that the solutions to restoring Indigenous women’s safety and balance in our communities must come from Indigenous women, and we called for increased and sustainable investments into Indigenous women’s organizations and their culturally safe preventative programming.

Responding to Municipal Declarations of Intimate Partner Violence as an Epidemic

This year saw intimate partner violence rise to the top of the municipal agenda, with 100 municipalities in Ontario declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic in response to recommendations from the 2015 Coroner’s Inquest into the deaths of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk, and Nathalie Warmerdam in Renfrew County. In November 2024, ONWA and the other members of the Indigenous Women’s Advisory Council (IWAC) released a statement

in response to the municipal declarations and the introduction of Bill 173, Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act in Ontario. Our statement called attention to the differential response to the murders of Indigenous women, which have not resulted in the same level of community and political mobilization, and urged municipalities to consider the disproportionate rates of intimate partner violence experienced by Indigenous women and the multiple barriers they face when seeking help. We put forward seven recommendations for all jurisdictions, emphasizing the urgency of working with and supporting Indigenous women, our organizations, and communities to end the violence against us. In 2024-25, ONWA made several submissions to government on family violence, including:

- Submission to the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Justice Policy on Indigenous Women’s Experiences of Intimate Partner and Family Violence
- Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) on Indigenous Women’s Experiences of Gender-Based Violence
- Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) on the Criminalization of Coercive Behaviour

Statement From the Ontario Indigenous Women’s Advisory Council on Declaring Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic

See our Statement here: onwa.ca/post/iwac-declares-epidemic-2024

Sexual Violence

ONWA recognizes that sexual violence remains underreported, and that Indigenous women often experience multiple barriers in disclosing their experiences. ONWA advocates for improved responses amongst systems (justice, health care, and others) and for culturally based, Indigenous women specific supports to be widely available. Indigenous women deserve safety, dignity and respect and the systems intended to protect and support Indigenous women must not do further harm.

Program Highlights

Indigenous Sexual Assault Prevention Program

The Indigenous Sexual Assault Prevention Program works in collaboration with ONWA’s Indigenous Victim Family Liaison Program to provide immediate, culturally grounded support to Indigenous women who are survivors of sexual assault in Sioux Lookout. The program specializes in individualized case management and offers wraparound services that incorporate cultural intervention practices to support healing, safety, and empowerment. In 2024-25, the program saw an increase in requests to support Indigenous women navigating the judicial system following sexual assault.

Coaching Boys into Men Partnership with Interval House of Hamilton

Over 2024-25, ONWA developed a partnership with the Interval House of Hamilton to advise on the implementation of their Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM) Program in over 200 schools in Ontario. CBIM is an evidence-based program for boys aged 13 - 20 that aims to reduce youth dating violence. CBIM trains coaches/teachers in schools to facilitate 12 weekly 15-minute conversations with boys’ teams/classes on healthy relationships, consent, mental health, bystander intervention, peer pressure, and respect. Over the next two years, ONWA will continue serving on their stakeholder council to advise on program content related to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls

Membership Highlights

8th Annual Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry Night

On November 25, 2024, ONWA and the Hamilton-Wentworth Chapter of Native Women successfully hosted the 9th Annual Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry Night at their location in Hamilton, Ontario. Over 10 poets spoke and delivered their poetry to over 100 participants. The 8th edition of the Annual Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry book was also launched at the event. The book contains more than 135 poems submitted by Indigenous women across Canada.

Recognizing the impact of the annual poetry night on community members, ONWA developed a Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry Night Facilitator Guide to support ONWA members in planning and hosting their own poetry nights.

Good News Story:

Poetry Night Empowers Women to Speak Out

At this year’s Poetry Night, a woman who recently moved into the shelter at the Hamilton-Wentworth Chapter of Native Women shared that being welcomed by the Chapter and empowered to speak at this event was the first time she had felt safe in a long time. Supported by the other Indigenous women in the room, she shared her moving and emotional poetry.

Advocacy Highlights

Amplifying the voices of survivors and their experiences with the justice system

In December 2024, ONWA provided input into the Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime (OFOVC) systemic investigation on the treatment of sexual assault survivors within Canada’s criminal justice system. We spoke to the lack of safety that Indigenous women feel within the justice system and the need for dedicated, cultural and Indigenous women-led support services and safety planning for Indigenous women navigating this system. ONWA also offered feedback on the forthcoming Victims of Crime Toolkit to ensure the unique perspectives and experiences of Indigenous women are considered when navigating the Federal Corrections and Conditional Release System.

ONWA made a submission to the OFOVC’s Systemic Investigation into the Treatment of Sexual Assault within the Canadian Criminal Justice System.

The Sexual Violence Research Project

In 2024-25, the Sexual Violence Research Project ended with a blanketing ceremony for the 16-member advisory committee who bravely and generously shared their wisdom, advice, witnessing, and lived experiences over the six years of the project lifespan. The committee, guided by Elders and comprised of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit women, including Indigenous women living in urban settings, provided key insights to inform wise practices to address sexual violence and build a foundation of knowledge to inform systemic change, create a responsive healing-centered program for survivors and their families, and tools for front-line workers to support women and their families.

The Wise Practices Report offers a guide to address sexual violence through systemic change, healing-centered programs for survivors and their families, and tools for frontline workers.



Child Welfare

ONWA advocates for a reduction in the overrepresentation of Indigenous mothers and their children in the child welfare system through prevention-focused supports that restore Indigenous women’s inherent rights and traditional roles as life givers, mothers, and caregivers. directed ONWA to take action to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care. ONWA advocates for sustainable, prevention-focused funding for Indigenous women’s organizations as well as legislative reform to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children involved in the child welfare system. Transformation of the child welfare system requires investment in Indigenous women’s safety, family and community healing, and culture.

Program Highlights

Indigenous Healthy Babies Healthy Children (IHBHC) Program

The IHBHC program provided culturally grounded services to Indigenous women and their families, focusing on prevention, early intervention, and health supports. Central to the IHBHC program is the promotion of land-based therapy, the expansion of pathways for healthy growth and development, and the celebration of new additions to the community. Throughout the year, 180 families involved with the child welfare system received advocacy, early intervention and prevention services.

This year, ONWA also created the Indinawemaaganidog “All of my relatives” Indigenous art colouring book, in collaboration with eight Indigenous artists, which was incorporated into the IHBHC program to foster togetherness and inspire families to be creative and share knowledge and stories from their own communities.

Through the province-wide **Maamawi “All Together” Parenting Program**, IHBHC offers specialized parenting support that includes ceremony, cultural teachings, and practical guidance. This program helps caregivers respond to the needs and behaviours of their children, promotes safety and security in parenting, and provides tools for managing stress. Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Helpers play an essential role, offering traditional teachings and spiritual guidance throughout the duration of the

program. Through the Maamawi “All Together” Parenting Program, ONWA supported 21 reunification plans to successfully reunify families with their children. In 2024-2025, through Maamawi, 131 mothers participated in capacity building and gained confidence in their parenting skills and their roles as Mothers.

In March 2025, ONWA delivered the Maamawi “All Together” parenting program facilitator training to ten (10) Chapter staff who deliver wholistic and culturally rooted parenting programs.

“This training will benefit my CM’s [community members] by building confidence in their parenting and finding extra supports to help them with being comfortable and secure with their parenting style.”

“Chi miigwetch for the opportunity this was truly a life changing experience, and I am so excited to be able to facilitate this with CM’s [community members].”

“Breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect. Teach and show parents to engage and bond with their children while taking care of themselves.”

The Child Welfare Advocate Program

The Child Welfare Advocate program is connected to the BFFV program. The Child Welfare Advocate program focuses on Indigenous women and their families involved in the child welfare system or women who have experienced family violence. The program assists Indigenous women and their families in navigating the complexities of the

child welfare system and advocates for women to establish sustainable crisis management support for themselves and their families. In 2024-25, through this program:

- 250+ prevention services were provided to Indigenous women
- Almost 240 child welfare advocacy services were provided with a focus on prevention, cultural integration, and early intervention

Alternative Caregiver Training for Children’s Aid Societies in the North

In an ongoing collaboration between the Thunder Bay Children’s Aid Society and the Kenora-Rainy River Child and Family Services, ONWA provided the “Caring for Our Children” alternative caregiver training through virtual and in-person sessions. This is a training requirement for all non-Indigenous foster families who are caring for Indigenous children. We continue to build relationships with child welfare organizations as ONWA is committed to ensuring that non-Indigenous caregivers have all the tools they require to care for Indigenous children. 100% of training participants identified that because of the training, they have more knowledge and skills to take care of Indigenous children.

Youth Programming: Youth in Transition (YIT), Youth in Transition Housing (YITH), Cultural Intervention, and Youth Education Programs

ONWA’s YIT, YITH, Youth Cultural Intervention and Youth Education programs focus on building capacity through meaningful engagement with youth, guided by principles of respect, honour, and empowerment. These immersive programs support youth in embracing their inherent roles, strengthening future generations, and fostering healing and reclamation. ONWA’s Youth Programs continued to help youth navigate complex adult systems, while promoting autonomy, empowerment, and the development of strong, independent Indigenous youth as they transition into adulthood. In 2024-2025, ONWA:

- Supported over 60 youth safety and care plans to prepare youth for transitioning out of child welfare
- Engaged with over 40 youth on post-secondary education and training
- Provided housing support to over 200 youth, such as finding housing, support with first/last month’s rent, and eviction prevention
- Supported over 150 youth with prevention-based services

Membership Highlights

Parenting Across the Lifecycle Program Supports

The Parenting Across the Lifecycle program was delivered in three (3) chapter sites in 2024-2025: **Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association** in Penetanguishene, **Sunset Women’s Aboriginal Circle** in Sioux Lookout and **Beendigen Inc.** in Thunder Bay. The Parenting Across the Lifecycle program is essential in empowering Indigenous families to build a strong support system and to center traditional teachings and culture in their homes. Programming included workshops for parents on child welfare processes and rights, berry fast preparation, spirit first, memorial feasts, and youth outings. This year, the program:

- Served 145 community members and offered various programs to increase cultural knowledge, parenting and life skills, and traditional teachings.
- Reported 10 child welfare cases closed and supported 5 families in total with unification and reunification.
- Provided ongoing one-to-one parenting support with 25 individuals.

Additionally, the program provided parenting bundles to ONWA membership to be shared with their community members. Parenting bundles included cribs, formula, diapers, wipes, car seats, strollers, toddler beds and other basic essential items to support families in need.



Advocacy Highlights

Improving Access to Prevention Services

In January 2025, ONWA provided feedback through a submission to MCCSS on proposed amendments to regulations under the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 (CYFSA) which would operationalize the CYFSA provisions relating to prevention-focused Indigenous service providers (PFISPs). These provisions are the result of consistent advocacy by ONWA and other urban Indigenous partners. Under the regulations, Indigenous service providers who meet certain criteria will be able to apply to be listed as “PFISPs” on a Ministry hosted website, and Children’s Aid Societies will be required to provide information about their services at the earliest opportunity to Indigenous children involved with the Society.

Honouring the Rights of Indigenous Mothering: Child Welfare Engagement Report

Throughout the year, ONWA completed affirmation of our child welfare engagement report entitled: Honouring the Rights of Indigenous Mothering. ONWA uses the strengths-based term of “affirmation” instead of the more commonly used concept of “research validation”, to ensure the perspectives and knowledge researchers gather, analyze and present uphold Indigenous women’s truth and accurately represents their lived experiences. The majority, 89%, of ONWA membership agreed or strongly agreed with the recommendations made in the Honouring the Rights of Indigenous Mothering report. Feedback was used to revise and strengthen the draft engagement report to ensure Indigenous mothers are supported through policy and advocacy recommendations centered around preventing child welfare intervention.

“Having a report that acknowledges, makes space and begins to make changes can help to aid the validation that change may begin to occur. I have no regrets about participating in this engagement, it has brought forth many struggles, suggestions and experiences.” -Membership Quote

Human Trafficking

ONWA is a leader in providing culturally grounded anti-human trafficking supports. Our Courage for Change program remains the largest Indigenous anti-trafficking program in Canada. ONWA recognizes that Indigenous survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation are the experts, our Journey to Safe Spaces: Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Engagement report that includes the advice of survivors continues to inform all aspects of our work to keep Indigenous women safe. The recommendations in our report continue to guide ONWA’s programming, services and advocacy.

Program Highlights

Courage for Change: Anti-Human Trafficking Program

ONWA specializes in supporting Indigenous youth, women and families in exiting human trafficking, sexual exploitation and targeting across the province. This intensive case management program focuses on prevention, stabilization, and healing for all community members and families engaged in this important work.

In 2024-25, the Courage for Change program:

- Supported 783 exits from exploitation and beginning their healing and wellness journeys
- Completed 468 safety plans to assist Indigenous women to exit exploitation
- Supported 435 Indigenous women with addiction supports with 39 people attending residential treatment
- Provided 524 services to Indigenous women in gaining and maintaining stable housing.
- Supported 201 Indigenous women through justice systems

At the heart of reconciliation and meaningful community engagement lies partnership— Courage for Change Toronto has successfully reconnected with the Toronto Police Services (TPS). Together, we are exploring new areas of collaboration, a perfect demonstration of what is possible when Indigenous organizations and public institutions work together with mutual respect, humility, and a shared commitment to positive change.

Community Safety Liaison and the Mental Health and Addictions Anti-Human Trafficking Liaison

In response to partners, front-line workers and community requests, ONWA strengthen capacity-building and awareness-raising training with new content that reflects a more comprehensive overview of the intersectional issues of HT, MMIWG, VAW, and the impacts of systems of patriarchy and matrilineal denigration. The training also expands best practices for working with survivors and reestablishes culturally rooted approaches to healing, harm reduction, and Indigenous trauma informed care. Throughout 2024-25, ONWA provided 54 training sessions to service providers, community members and ONWA membership.

Advocacy Highlights

Renewal of Ontario’s Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy and the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking

In 2024-25, ONWA participated in the Five-Year Review of Ontario’s second Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy 2020-2025 as well as the renewal of Canada’s National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking. ONWA’s review and analysis of both strategies identified key successes as well as opportunities to improve existing initiatives and address remaining gaps. ONWA called for increased investment into Indigenous-women’s organizations to provide services and supports for survivors across the healing continuum. Our submissions highlighted the need for Indigenous women’s healing programs that support reclamation of culture, identity and Indigenous women’s leadership through cultural healing practices and connection to land.

In addition, ONWA also made submissions to:

- Ministry of the Solicitor General on the Proposed New Regulation under the Accommodation Sector Registration of Guests Act
- Ministry of Transportation on the Southwestern Ontario Transportation Planning Study
- Emergency Management Ontario on Bill 238, Emergency Management Modernization Act: Proposed amendments to Emergency Management and Protection Act (EMCPA)
- UN Human Rights Council on Indigenous Women Survivors of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation

Good News Story:

Expanded Confidence in Advocacy Leadership, Systems Reform & Allyship

Over the last year, ONWA saw an increase in the understanding that combating the exploitation of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people requires a fulsome community response. In 2024-25, ONWA saw an increase in requests for collaboration, policy revision, and training from non-Indigenous service providers. Importantly, non-Indigenous service providers acknowledged that Indigenous women and communities are the experts, the knowledge holders and the leaders meant to show others how to address the exploitative fracture and how to walk beside us in repair, restoration and allyship.

In 2024-25, ONWA:

- Facilitated 54 capacity building training courses for stakeholders across the province including more than 60 unique service providers and,
- Over 1,200 participants strengthened their knowledge of Indigenous based anti-trafficking awareness, best practices in prevention and intervention, intersectional issues, and Indigenous based, trauma informed care.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

ONWA honours the bravery, wisdom and leadership of all survivors and family members impacted by the ongoing crisis of MMIWG. Their voices, strength, and tireless grassroots efforts drive our work to deliver programming that addresses MMIWG and are the foundation of our advocacy to call for government action and hold governments accountable to keep Indigenous women and their families safe.

Program Highlights

Indigenous Victim and Family Liaison (IVFL) Program

IVFL program specializes in wellness pathways, justice navigation, and specialized continuum of care planning. It operates in collaboration with ONWA's Indigenous Sexual Assault Prevention program to provide wrap around support for community members. The IVFL team walks with Indigenous women and their families, ensuring that services are trauma-informed and culturally relevant within systems that are historically oppressive to Indigenous victims. Over the past year, with IVFL Program support:

- 55 Indigenous women were supported to safely exit domestic violence situations.
- An additional 34 Indigenous women received assistance with visitation, reunification and child welfare file closures.
- 100 women successfully secured independent housing after fleeing domestic violence, reaching a critical step toward safety, healing, and stability.

Missing Persons Toolkit

In 2024-25, the Missing Persons Toolkit was updated to reflect current trends and realities, changes in technology and law enforcement responses/services. Through engagement with families of MMIWG, the ONWA confirmed critical pieces required in raising awareness of a missing person. This newly refreshed toolkit has an expanded directory of resources at the local and the provincial level.

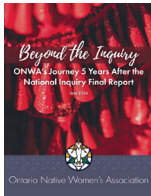
MMIWG2S+ Database

In 2024-25, ONWA joined Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, Les Michifs Otipemisiwak and 2 Spirits in Motion as a collaborative partnership to create a comprehensive, national MMIWG2S+ Database built from publicly available data. The project aims to address critical information gaps by compiling and transforming MMIWG2S+ data into actionable knowledge to advance implementation of all 231 Calls for Justice.

Advocacy Highlights

Beyond the National Inquiry

In June 2024, to honour the five-year anniversary of the release of the National Inquiry's Final Report, ONWA published our Beyond the Inquiry report. The report outlines ONWA's journey to improve Indigenous women's safety over the last five years and speaks to the current challenges in addressing MMIWG, including inadequate investments, slow implementation of the Calls for Justice and the National Action Plan, and Canada's Nation-to-Nation/Distinctions-Based approach to policy development and funding that continues to exclude Indigenous women and their organizations. ONWA calls on all levels of government to prioritize Indigenous women's safety, support Indigenous women's leadership, and invest in our solutions.



Read the report here: onwa.ca/beyond-the-inquiry-2024



*"Miigwetch for your beautiful art! It touched my heart.
I wish you peace. I wish you justice."*

MMIWG Oversight and Accountability

ONWA continued to advocate for the development and implementation of oversight accountability mechanisms for government commitments to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls. ONWA convened four (4) national Indigenous Women's Accountability Table (IWAT) meetings throughout the year to monitor the implementation and outcomes of the MMIWG National Action Plan. In February and March 2025, ONWA brought together IWAT members, regional Indigenous women's organizations, and ONWA membership organizations for a presentation and workshop to explore the impacts of Canada's Nation-to-Nation/Distinctions-Based policy approach on Indigenous women and our organizations. Participants discussed strategies to build the capacity of Indigenous women's organizations to advocate for our inclusion in funding opportunities and decision making at all levels of government. In addition, ONWA's CEO participated in the third Federal Provincial Territorial- Indigenous (FPT-I) Roundtable on MMIWG and spoke to the need for measurable changes to improving Indigenous women's safety.

At the provincial level, ONWA's CEO remains the Co-Chair of the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council (IWAC). IWAC continues to work collectively to improve the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous women and girls in Ontario by providing strategic advice to multiple ministries and through monitoring the implementation of Ontario's Pathways to Safety Strategy.

Measuring Progress to Improve Indigenous Women's Safety

Working collaboratively with IWAC partners, ONWA led the development of a Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) for Ontario's Pathways to Safety Strategy – a strategy aimed at improving safety and well-being for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities. This initiative recognizes that safety must be defined by Indigenous women,

girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Peoples themselves and is a continuation of a larger narrative - one that prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing in building meaningful measures of safety as a powerful tool for justice, healing and change.

Over the course of a year, the project advanced a strengths-based approach to measuring safety - highlighting protective factors like cultural connection, community strength, and Indigenous knowledge. The Pathways to Safety PMF is a critical step toward building an inclusive and sustainable accountability framework that defines and supports safety for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Peoples living in rural, remote, northern, and urban contexts.

Ending Sex Discrimination in the Indian Act

In April 2024, ONWA provided a submission to Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) as part of the Indigenous Advisory Process to identify legislative solutions to the second-generation cut-off in the Indian Act. In our submission, Eliminating Discrimination in the Indian Act: Restoring Indigenous Women's Inherent Rights, ONWA put forward our position that all Indigenous women have a right to their Indigenous identity, culture, and community, as well as a right to pass on their culture to their children. We also highlighted how ongoing sex discrimination within the Indian Act perpetuates violence against Indigenous women. ONWA made recommendations on the design of ISC's consultation process as well as recommendations on how the Indian Act should be changed to implement a one-parent rule and eliminate the second-generation cut-off.

In addition, ONWA made a submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) Study on the Red Dress Alert System.





MMIWG Advocacy and Education

The Medicine Lines of Womanhood MMIWG Commemorative Art Exhibit is dedicated to creating a space of healing and raising awareness for MMIWG through powerful stories and impactful art. This curated exhibit is part of ONWA’s ongoing commitment to the family members and loved ones who participated in the project. The travelling art exhibit was shared with ONWA membership organizations and community partners throughout the province of Ontario. The exhibit educates the community about the high rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

Grandmother Earth dress is sacred - visioned in ceremony and created for healing families and communities of MMIWG. In 2024-25, presentations on Grandmother Earth Dress, MMIWG and community safety were delivered to Metrolinx, and the Bank of Montreal (BMO). Grandmother Earth Dress also attended Red Dress Day hosted by the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition, and Indigenous Legacy Gathering in Toronto, which brings thousands of children, youth, parents/caregivers, teachers and educators together to honour Indigenous Peoples, cultures and communities.

The 2024-25 Sisters in Spirit brought community together to honour the lives of MMIWG and to raise awareness of this issue. A short resource guide has been developed to assist communities in hosting their own SIS Vigil.

The annual Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Pow Wow was hosted at Animikii-Wajiw Thunder Bird Mountain, located on the Fort William First Nation. With a focus on healing, culture, and community, ONWA welcomed over 500 people and honoured MMIWG and their families. Attendees were encouraged to bring their feasting bundles and water bottles as a part of our Mother Earth strategy.

Urban Indigenous Safety Plan

On the five-year anniversary of Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG, ONWA announced the joint development of an Urban Indigenous Community Safety Plan for Thunder Bay. In collaboration with multiple partners, and with guidance and endorsement from Public Safety Canada, this group seeks to address the systemic issues affecting Indigenous women and girls, promote safety, healing, and reconciliation, honour the lives of MMIWG2S, and prevent further tragedies through proactive and community-led initiatives.

onwa.ca/post/development-of-urban-indigenous-community-safety-plan-in-thunder-bay

Housing and Homelessness

Indigenous women continue to experience a lack of access to culturally safe shelters and safe, affordable housing. Priority access to safe, secure and affordable housing across the housing continuum is urgently needed.

Program Highlights

Nihdawin “Our Home” Program

The Nihdawin program uses ONWA’s Indigenous Women’s Housing First Model which prioritizes the safety of Indigenous women, youth, and families through cultural interventions and stabilization to address homelessness across the province. The Nihdawin program assists Indigenous women and their families, who are at severe risk of homelessness, and those experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness. With staggering increases in encampments across the province, this program supports Indigenous women to access sustainable, affordable, independent housing. In 2024-25:

- 938 community members were successfully housed or re-housed.
- 131 safety plans were completed to assist Indigenous women to gain or maintain independent housing.

Advocacy Highlights

Collective Advocacy with Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS)

In 2024-25, ONWA’s CEO continued in her role as Chair of the OAHS Board of Directors. ONWA works collaboratively with OAHS, and the other Director Member Organizations (DMOs) – the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) and the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) – to advance housing related issues affecting urban Indigenous Peoples across the province. This year, OAHS delivered over \$35M in funding to 43 Indigenous service providers across the province, and created 158 new housing units. This year was OAHS’s 30th year, and a



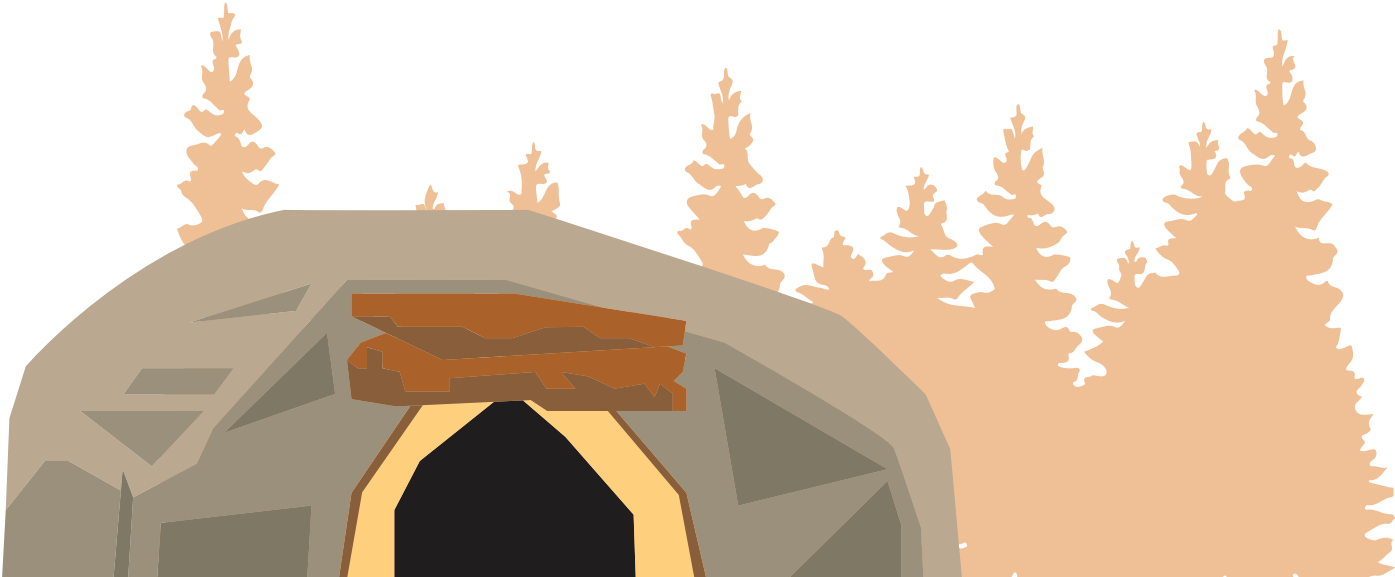
key priority was to update the Ontario Urban and Rural First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) Housing Policy (OUR) Framework, to be launched in summer 2025. Originally developed in 2013, this framework is a strategic guide developed to support culturally appropriate, community-driven housing solutions for Indigenous people living off-reserve in urban and rural areas across Ontario. In updating the framework, OAHS and the DMO's engaged with over 650 community members to ensure urban Indigenous community voices were included.

Upholding Indigenous Women’s Right to Safe, Adequate, and Affordable Housing

In April 2025, ONWA provided a submission to the National Housing Council Neha Review Panel on Indigenous women’s right to safe, adequate, and affordable housing. Our submission outlined our vision for safe, adequate and affordable housing for Indigenous women and emphasized the link between Indigenous women’s experiences of violence and homelessness/ housing instability. We shared a number of recommendations, such as ensuring Indigenous women’s full and meaningful engagement and participation at all levels of government planning and decision making related to housing.

Reviewing the Impacts of Federal Housing Investments

In June 2024, ONWA provided a submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) study on the impacts of federal housing investments. Our feedback highlighted our concerns that federal investments have not met the core housing need for Indigenous women. We provided recommended actions to remedy the federal funding deficiencies and improve oversight to ensure more Indigenous specific housing in urban, rural, and northern communities to meet the needs of Indigenous women.



Justice

Indigenous women remain overrepresented in the justice system, continuing to make up a disproportionate number of incarcerated women federally and provincially. ONWA recognizes the urgent need for a culturally safe justice system invested in Indigenous women’s wellbeing and free of discrimination and racism. ONWA provides essential wrap-around supports to Indigenous women and girls involved with the justice system to support their safety and wellbeing as they navigate this colonial system.

Program Highlights

Gladue Writer, Gladue at Bail, and Gladue Aftercare Programs

ONWA’s Gladue Writers produce Gladue Bail Letters, Gladue Letters, and Gladue Reports for Indigenous women and youth, contributing to significantly reduced sentencing durations and, in some cases, the dismissal of current and pending charges. Complementing this work, Gladue Aftercare Case Workers provide post incarceration support to Indigenous women and youth, including safety planning, prevention-based services, aftercare, and system navigation. These services aim to reduce recidivism among Indigenous women and youth in Hamilton, Ottawa and Thunder Bay.

The Gladue at Bail program is the only Gladue-specific initiative that is tailored to support Indigenous women and youth at the point of being accused. This program successfully facilitated early intervention by helping community members navigate legal systems and access supports prior to court proceedings or convictions.

Advocacy Highlights

Supporting Indigenous Youth in the Youth Justice System

In August 2024, ONWA provided recommendations to Ontario’s Youth Justice Task Force to improve programs, services, and data collection practices in the youth justice sector. The Task Force was established to advise the Minister of Children, Community and Social

Services on how to address the needs of youth in the youth justice system. ONWA’s submission emphasized that Indigenous youth require dedicated culture-based services when they are at risk of becoming or involved with the youth justice system. Our submission highlighted the link between child welfare and youth justice involvement, calling for investment in prevention-focused, Indigenous-led programs and services for Indigenous youth.

Indigenous Justice Strategy

In June 2024, ONWA submitted recommendations to the Department of Justice Canada on the development of the Indigenous Justice Strategy (IJS), based on engagement with membership and community members. The IJS was released in March 2025 and reflects many of ONWA’s recommendations, including expanding access to culturally safe wrap around services for Indigenous people in custody to support healing and reintegration, as well as culturally safe and trauma informed victim services.

Monitoring Implementation of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

ONWA continued to monitor Canada’s implementation of UNDRIP and prepared a written submission to inform the fourth annual Progress Report on the implementation of Canada’s United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA). ONWA continued to advocate for our Nation-to-Nation/ Distinction-Based PLUS approach to engagement, policy development and funding opportunities



to ensure that Indigenous women and our organizations are informed, involved, consulted and benefit from resources being allocated to address key issues of concern for Indigenous women and their families. ONWA also called attention to the lack of progress on advancing Indigenous women's right to safety, pointing to slow implementation of the MMIWG National Action Plan and critical Calls to Justice.

Additionally, ONWA made the following submissions:

- Submission to the Ministry of the Solicitor General on Proposed Regulations under Private Security and Investigative Services Act
- Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers



Health

Impacted by colonial legacies and systemic sexism, misogyny and racism, Indigenous women in Canada experience poorer social determinants of health, higher rates of chronic disease, increased complex mental health and addictions, and poorer overall health outcomes than non-Indigenous women. ONWA members directed ONWA to take action to address racism and discrimination in the health care system. ONWA works to ensure Indigenous women's voices are centered within the health system, through partnerships and funding for Indigenous women's organizations to deliver specialized, culturally grounded health services.

Program Highlights

Healing, Empowerment, Safety and Reclamation (HERS) project

ONWA continues working on the HERS project to support staff and to respond or heal from lateral violence. The HERS project addresses lateral violence through organizational policy and practice, communication and conversation and personal wellbeing. In 2024-25, through the HERS project, ONWA developed staff resources, including a presentation, report, and four infographics to support ongoing conversations on lateral violence and to promote and strengthen the continued self-care and wellbeing of staff. Through the project, ONWA also led an in-person lateral violence and harassment training for staff.

Mental Health and Addictions Day Treatment Program and After-care (Mental Health and Wellness program)

The Mental Health and Wellness program offers a range of cultural intervention strategies and practices to address mental health and substance misuse, guided by a two-eyed seeing approach to wellness and healing. The program provides a comprehensive and accessible day treatment model that integrates pre-treatment, treatment, and aftercare as a seamless wrap around service. Rooted in ceremony and Indigenous ways of being and knowing, the program supports individuals navigating grief and loss, coping strategies, addiction, healthy relationships, and codependency. Recognized within the community as an innovative and effective model, the Mental Health and Wellness program continues to be a leading best practice.

Through the program, in 2024-25:

- 502 individuals attended day treatment
- 1412 Addiction supports and/or aftercare services were provided
- 497 cultural interventions provided
- 361 Indigenous women were connected to wrap around supports and services

Good News Story: Supporting Well-ness through Mental Health

Since working with ONWA's Mental Health Worker, a mother of three children found employment and is building her self esteem as a single mother and a strong Indigenous woman. She is now living a healthy life and has moved into a new home that is more conducive to the needs of her family. She feels that because "ONWA, has always treated her with respect, and always talked to her and makes time for her" she felt "listened to and heard" and "safe" and feels she is building on her positive traits, feels worthy of her employment and is starting to feel more part of her community and her culture. She shared she enjoys the drumming and all the cultural activities that ONWA puts on and loves that her children are welcome.

Mindimooyenh Health Clinic

ONWA established the Mindimooyenh clinic in 2021 in response to the discrimination Indigenous women were facing, and the lack of access to vaccines for urban Indigenous people living in urban settings – ONWA responded to community requests for a new, culturally-safe system. ONWA has since secured long-term, sustainable funding to continue meeting community need and expanding clinic services. It is now the largest investment in Indigenous women’s health outside of midwifery.

In recent years, there has been significant recognition of the invaluable knowledge Indigenous women possess regarding wellness and self-healing practices. However, despite this acknowledgment, mainstream healthcare systems have continued to inadequately address the specific needs of Indigenous women and their families. This gap highlights the urgent need for healthcare approaches that are inclusive and culturally grounded. Effective interventions for Indigenous women must adopt a holistic perspective on health, integrating traditional practices, ceremonies, and cultural beliefs with

Western medical approaches. In 2024-25, the Mindimooyenh Health Clinic made notable improvements in addressing these needs. The clinic successfully launched a nurse practitioner care program specifically designed for community members affiliated with ONWA and other membership organizations. This initiative represents a significant shift toward providing more personalized and accessible healthcare options, which include transportation services for medical appointments and in-house phlebotomy. Additionally, the clinic has introduced a dedicated mental health worker to facilitate talk therapy, acknowledging the essential role of mental health in overall wellness. Together, these initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to honoring cultural practices while delivering comprehensive care tailored to the unique experiences of Indigenous women and their communities.

In 2024-25,

- Health supports were provided to 13,382 community members
- Health education resources were provided directly to 677 community members
- 166 community members were supported with various land-based activities
- Administered 294 covid vaccines
- Administered 324 influenza vaccines

Membership Highlights

Ska-be (Helper) Program

The Ska-be (Helper) program supports Elders and community members with chronic illness or disabilities to live independently in their homes as long as possible and improve their quality of life. Ska-be workers fill a critical gap in elder services including personal support services, respite services, food security, cultural enrichment and palliative care support. In 2024-25, the Ska-be program was delivered by 3 (three) ONWA members **Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association, Niagara Chapter of Native Women**

“The Ska-be program has been an invaluable resource for our family, particularly for our mother, who serves as our matriarch. The program offers not only essential services but also companionship and emotional support, which have significantly enriched her quality of life. The Ska-be workers assist her with a variety of daily tasks including meal preparation, helping with showering, and providing social interaction, which helps to combat isolation. Additionally, they support her in attending medical appointments and engaging in ONWA programming, ensuring she has access to necessary healthcare and community resources. The positive impact that Ska-be has had on our mother and our family as a whole is immeasurable. We are deeply grateful for the dedication and care that the organization and its workers provide. Their support has truly transformed our lives, and we cannot thank them enough for all they do” - Family of community member



and **Sunset Women’s Aboriginal Circle** in Sioux Lookout.

In 2025-25, the Ska-be program supported:

- 233 therapeutic interventions provided to community members
- 177 Plans of Care created to support Elders in independence and wellness
- 423 home visits from PSWs to provide personal care services to elderly community members

Advocacy Highlights

ONWA continues to advocate for improved, culturally safe health care to better meet the needs of Indigenous women. Over 2024-25, ONWA remained an active participant on the Ministry of Health’s Urban Indigenous Health Table (UIHT) and provided input into many provincial health policy initiatives. For example, ONWA provided recommendations to the Chief Medical Officer of Health regarding immunization outcomes for Indigenous women and their families as well as feedback to update Ontario’s Public Health Standards and Guidelines. Through this work, ONWA successfully influenced changes in these standards to ensure public health units are mandated to develop stronger relationships with Indigenous communities, including Indigenous women’s organizations to inform local public health service delivery.

Following the signing of an MOU with Ontario Health in May 2024, ONWA continued to engage with and provide feedback on many Ontario Health initiatives. This included the Indigenous Cancer Strategy, Indigenous Renal Strategy, ongoing cancer screening work, as well as the development of the First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Urban Indigenous Health Plan. ONWA also built new relationships with the Patient Ombudsman and the new Primary Care Action Team, based in the Ministry of Health.

ONWA made several other policy submissions related to health:

- Submission to Ontario Health on Catching Cancers Early Research
- Submission to the Ministry of Health on Ontario Public Health Standards, including Relationships with Indigenous Communities Protocol
- Submission to the Ministry of Health on Proposed Regulatory Amendments to Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA): Regulation 570: School Health Programs and Services
- Submission to Senator Roundtable on Achieving Mental Health, Substance Use and Addiction Parity for Indigenous Women in Canada
- Submission to the Ministry of Health on the Proposed Regulation to Prescribe Entities under the Seniors Active Living Centres Act, 2017 (SALCA)



Building Our Organizational Capacity

Our Workforce

ONWA is committed to attracting and retaining qualified Indigenous applicants through competitive recruitment. Our workforce represents the community members we serve with 65% of our workforce being Indigenous Peoples and 61% of these being Indigenous woman. This will continue to be our focus in 2025-26 as we strive towards the goal of 75% Indigenous workforce.

Our Recruitment

ONWA continued to concentrate our efforts on engaging Indigenous applicants through a diverse array of communication channels such as radio, newspapers, social media platforms, and provincial publications. Furthermore, last year we broadened our outreach by collaborating with additional Indigenous partners, organizations, and stakeholders, and actively participating in career fairs tailored specifically to Indigenous communities. Based on ONWA’s recruitment efforts, there was an overall 10.3% increase in candidates applying to vacancies, with over 5,096 candidates applying.

Our Wellness

The health and wellness of our workforce is paramount to ensuring our employees are balancing their work and their home lives. ONWA offered a very comprehensive benefits program which is inclusive of immediate online access to health care practitioners, mental health counsellors and an online pharmacy. Our benefits program worked to support our employees and their families, in their time of need. We provided immediate access to the Employee & Family Assistance Program for all new hires with no waiting period.

Marketing and Communications Highlights



277,631,383
Overall Media Impact (approx.)

Website (onwa.ca)
134,938 impact

Facebook (@ONWA7)
5,47,000 impact
42% paid impressions
1688 content items (posts)
17,542 followers

Instagram (@onwa_official)
414,800 impact
1354 content items (posts)
4667 followers

Twitter (@_ONWA_)
225,680 impact
1631 content items (posts)
6120 followers

Twitch (@ONWA_Official)
225,680 impact
1631 content items (posts)
6120 followers

YouTube (@onwa_official)
160,004 impact
54 content items (videos)
2405 followers

LinkedIn
482,700 impact
1693 content items (posts)
9757 followers

News
134,938 impact
1152 media exposure (number of articles)

Advertisement
5,950,434 impact

She Is Wise Magazine
5,950,434 impact

ONTARIO NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Empowering Indigenous Women Throughout Ontario

A Voice for Indigenous Women's Issues



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