

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network: Indigenous Outreach Report

Pregnancy and Infant Loss:

Understanding the Experiences of Indigenous Professionals and Families/Individuals

Pregnancy and Infant Loss (PAIL) Network is committed to improving support for all Ontario families who experience the loss of a pregnancy, death of an infant or elective abortion no matter the circumstances that surround that event. We know that different individuals and families experience loss and grief in different ways. Health professionals working with Indigenous families and in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) communities across Ontario need the tools to provide compassionate care and guidance to families during this time, and communities need to have the capacity to wrap around these families to support their mourning. Indigenous families who lose a baby or infant or choose an elective abortion can experience additional trauma when available supports are not inclusive and reflective of their experiences and needs.

Overview

PAIL Network knows from earlier outreach efforts and consultations that existing support services for Indigenous families who experience the loss of their pregnancy or infant are not always adequate or culturally inclusive. As part of our efforts to fulfill our mandate given to us by the Ministry of Health to provide peer support for families and education for healthcare professionals, we undertook a focused consultation with Indigenous health professionals, FNIM community members and Friendship Centres to better understand their experiences with pregnancy loss, infant death and elective abortion, explore unmet educational needs of professionals, and what can be done to improve the care and support families receive. An initial mail out to 76 Indigenous midwifery services, health centres and friendship centres across Ontario was completed and consultations were conducted.

A total of 9 organizations across the province were consulted with via Zoom as a result of the physical and digital mail out.

About the Consultations

Indigenous community members and professionals were consulted. The consultations were designed around sharing, listening, and learning.

- We discussed what PAIL Network does and the types of support we provide.
- We asked them about the support they provide and if it includes support for pregnancy loss, infant death or elective abortion.
- We listened to what they had to say in terms of the support we have to offer and what they think could work best in their community.

We learned that Indigenous professionals and community members are looking for:

- **Education for health care professionals** working with/in Indigenous communities, and with urban Indigenous families/individuals.
- **Culturally appropriate and informed support** for Indigenous families/individuals who have experienced a pregnancy loss, infant death or elective abortion.
- Effort from PAIL Network to be physically present in Indigenous communities to **build lasting and trusting relationships**.

- Ways to bridge the gap to **online support** for some Indigenous families/individuals without internet/data connection.

Action

After listening and learning from these professionals and community members working for these organizations, we have begun to take the following actions:

Education for Health Care Professionals

We are reviewing the curriculum for our Compassionate Care Workshops to ensure they are appropriate for health professionals working with/in Indigenous communities across Ontario. We will continue consulting with Indigenous communities across Ontario and the health professionals working in these communities. We have developed a working group with Indigenous professionals for guidance and feedback on these workshops and to determine what other modalities may be helpful, such as resource development, lunch n learn style presentations, and in person community events. In 2022-23, our focus will shift to learning more about the unmet educational needs of professionals and how PAIL Network can develop/co-design educational offerings for Indigenous communities and those who support families/individuals after pregnancy loss, infant death or elective abortion.

Culturally Appropriate and Informed Support for Indigenous Families/Individuals

We have learned that Indigenous families across Ontario have unique grief needs that can be difficult for non-Indigenous persons to understand. In response to this, we are recruiting and training Indigenous volunteers to facilitate online support groups for Indigenous families/individuals across Ontario. Once these Indigenous volunteers are trained and ready to facilitate support groups, we will then be reaching out to our contacts from health centres, nursing stations, friendship centres and communities across Ontario. We will look for support from our Indigenous contacts to help us to share information in their areas about these online groups for Indigenous families.

Building Lasting and Trusting Relationships

Since the COVID related travel restrictions are now starting to lift, PAIL Network is making it a priority to visit Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario for the Spring and Summer of 2022. These visits will consist of listening and learning from each other, information sharing, and beading workshops run by Joanna Diindiisikwe, PAIL Network's Special Projects Coordinator. We will seek opportunities to co-host these events with Indigenous organizations, where possible.

Online Access to PAIL Network Support

We have learned that some families may not have ways to access our online support groups. In response to this, we will be launching a pilot program that will provide iPads to Indigenous families/individuals who do not have Wi-fi or data connection in order to join online support groups. We have consulted with K-Net, a First Nations owned & operated ICT Service Provider, and learned that most households on reservations will have Wi-fi and if not, K-Net can provide cellular service and broadband connectivity. PAIL Network volunteers and regional reps have returned their iPads which will then be repurposed for this pilot program.

Conclusion

Providing equitable support to Indigenous communities across Ontario requires the Pregnancy and Infant Loss (PAIL) Network to adjust curriculum and support, build lasting and trusting relationships with Indigenous communities and ensure our resources and supports are accessible across all of Ontario.

We will work to make PAIL Network's educational resources appropriate for Indigenous families and professionals working in FNIM communities through meetings and consultations. We will visit communities and foster relationships built on actions. The first action we are taking is giving Indigenous people in Ontario the tools to support their own communities by getting online support groups in place and providing iPads with data to individuals/families who do not have data or Wi-fi. Our plan is action based and we will continue to learn and listen to Indigenous professionals and families across Ontario.