



**GIGANAWENIMAANAANIG**  
(We all take care of them)  
MMIWG2S+ Implementation Committee

# **Pilot Project to Develop a Manitoba-wide Red Dress Alert System Interim Summary Report to Our Communities**

June 3, 2025

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Giganawenimaanaanig (“We All Take Care of Them”) emerged from the provincial network of advocates, First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments and organizations, and other allies who worked together during the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We bring together family members; Survivors; urban Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving organizations including the Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre, Ka Ni Kanichihk, Winnipeg Indigenous Friendship Centre, Wahbung Abinoonjiiag, and Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle; regional and provincial bodies including MMIWG2S+ (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls) Liaison Unit of MKO (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak), Southern Chiefs’ Organization, Infinity Women’s Secretariat of the Manitoba Métis Federation, Manitoba Moon Voices, Cross Lake Community Council, City of Winnipeg, and the Province of Manitoba.

The Government of Canada and the Province of Manitoba have entrusted Giganawenimaanaanig with developing a pilot Indigenous-led, province-wide Red Dress Alert system. The goal is to create a new and unique alert system that can quickly mobilize police and other agencies, First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments and organizations, service providers, and the general public in the critical hours and days after an Indigenous woman, girl or 2SLGBTQQIA+ (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual) person is first reported missing.

The Red Dress Alert system is meant to provide effective protection for Indigenous women, girls or 2SLGBTQQIA+ persons who are at risk of harm. Giganawenimaanaanig is committed to ensuring that a Red Dress Alert system for Manitoba is rooted in cultural competency and safety, traditional knowledge, community empowerment, and trauma-informed healing.

The development of the Red Dress Alert system must be centred on the principle of “Nothing about us without us.” The voices of First Nation, Inuit and Métis women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ are the foundation for this critically important work.

With this vision in mind, Giganawenimaanaanig has undertaken a multi-staged engagement process with impacted families, communities, Nations and key organizations and institutions. The engagement process has been designed to examine in concrete detail what currently happens when a person is reported missing, the strengths and capacities that can be mobilized at the local level, and the changes that must be made to implement an effective, rapid, and coordinated response and follow-up process.

The project began in ceremony. Bundle Carriers have been chosen to be an integral part of our team as advisors. Families of missing women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ persons have shared

photos of their loved ones and this memory table has travelled with the team as a sacred way to honour their memories.

This short report is intended to provide an update to our partners and affected families and communities as we wrap up that engagement process. This interim report summarizes the process to date, provides a brief overview of key themes that have emerged, and sets out the steps to come.

A full report on what we have learned and our recommendations for the implementation of a Red Dress Alert system will be released on October 4, 2025. It is our hope that all partners will be able to move quickly to put a pilot Red Dress Alert system into place by early 2026 at the latest.

### **The engagement process to date**

Since January 23, 2025, Giganawenimaanaanig has convened 29 in-person engagement sessions in communities throughout Manitoba. These sessions were attended by Survivors, family members, leadership, community organizations, and other members of the host communities. The engagement sessions have included representation from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit from the north and south regions and from urban and rural communities.

Sagkeeng First Nation hosted the first engagement session. It was important to launch this process with Sagkeeng because their Nation has experienced the highest proportion of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit persons of any community in Canada. Sagkeeng has also been a leader in advocating for action to end this violence. The engagement session began with ceremony to recognize and honour their loved ones.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the following communities (in order of when the engagements were held):

- Sagkeeng First Nation
- Winnipeg
- O-Pipon Na Piwin Cree Nation
- Thompson
- Fisher River Cree Nation
- Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation
- Norway House Cree Nation
- Flin Flon
- Opaskwayak Cree Nation
- The Pas
- Hollow Water First Nation

- Infinity Women Secretariat, affiliate of Manitoba Métis Federation (in Dauphin, the Northwest Region of the MMF, with province-wide attendance by Red River Métis Members of IWS)
- Tunngasugit Inuit Resource Centre
- Sunshine House.

Recognizing that two-spirit persons and other members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community have distinct needs, and often face additional challenges in dealing with police and service agencies, two specific engagements were held in Winnipeg to focus on these themes. This discussion considered the distinct experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ persons, as well as the different realities of northern compared to southern communities, and urban communities compared to rural communities.

Additional engagement sessions were held to consider the experience of newcomers and the potential for collaboration between newcomer communities and Indigenous peoples. Additional thematic sessions and gatherings are planned, including a Women's Gathering and engagement sessions with people with lived experience of trafficking and people who have experienced housing insecurity.

In addition to these in-person engagements, a public survey is being conducted. The survey provided those who were unable to attend engagement session the opportunity to share their knowledge and contribute to the development process. It also provided those who attended sessions an opportunity to make additional contributions. Over a thousand surveys were completed and returned by the end of May.

We are grateful to everyone who took part in the in-person engagement sessions or who completed a survey. The dialogue has been much richer than we could have hoped. We are taking the time to carefully review, compare, and collate all the insights and recommendations that were shared. A full "What We Heard" report and a summary of survey results will be released in July.

What follows is a summary of some of the key themes to date. Our intent is to discuss these themes and more specific findings with partners as we develop our final report.

## **Key themes**

**1. Participants in the engagement process repeatedly emphasized the extreme urgency of establishing an effective Red Dress Alert system.** Despite greater public attention to these issues, Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit persons continue to face profound risks of violence, including intimate partner violence, abductions, and trafficking.

During our inaugural gathering at Sagkeeng, a community member said Manitoba needs to put a Red Dress Alert system in place before more names are added to their memorial. People are dying as we do this work. One participant from the Sunshine House gathering said, “I don’t want my name in that memory book.”

**2. There is no single technique or technology that would allow an Alert system to reach everyone.** It is vital that the Red Dress Alert system work in all communities throughout Manitoba, regardless of access to technology. Not everyone can be assumed to have a cell phone or internet access. In northern communities, in particular, connectivity remains limited. A wide range of media must be used to get the word out when someone goes missing, including radio and television, printed posters and electronic bulletin boards. In many communities and social circles, word of mouth is key.

In addition, it is important that Alerts be translated wherever there are significant populations for whom an Indigenous language is their first language.

**3. Great care must be taken to ensure that the information in an alert is dignified, accurate and current.** Many participants noted that the First Nations, Métis, or Inuit identity of missing persons is often inaccurately and negatively recorded and portrayed in media and in the public. Participants also talked about the need to share updates, particularly if the individual has been found and the search is no longer needed. Because some people who go missing have deliberately broken off contact to escape dangerous situations, care needs to be taken not to share information that could put them at great risk. Identifying someone as a member of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community can help engage relevant organizations and social circles, but care also needs to be taken about when it is appropriate to include this information, particularly with youth who may be “out” with the friends and peers, but not with parents, foster parents and others.

**4. Many community members told us that they want the Red Dress Alert system to be more than simply a way to distribute and draw attention to a missing persons announcement.** They said that a Red Dress Alert system must play an integral role in a holistic and integrated response that includes:

- Prompt, respectful recording of missing persons reports from immediate family, kin, friends, and support workers.
- Engaging Indigenous governments and representative organizations and Indigenous-led organizations.
- Initiating a two-way exchange of information with frontline organizations, service providers and others who may have had contact with the missing person.

- Activating equitable and timely police response and serving as a liaison between police and families or communities.
- Coordinating specific activities like a ground search or a door-to-door canvas.
- Targeting messages to specific communities and neighbourhoods who are most likely to have information about the missing person.
- Trying to reach directly to the individual and providing a safe way for them to make contact.
- Mobilizing specific resources and supports for affected families and friends.

We heard over and over again that these tasks can only be carried out effectively by those who have specific knowledge and understanding of the affected community or communities, as well as specialized training.

**5. Indigenous communities in Manitoba have important strengths on which to build.** We heard countless examples of communities who embrace the families and friends of missing persons, of leaders and organizations who assist in making a missing persons report, of volunteers who come out to search, and aunties who provide comfort and support. We also heard about the work that community organizations are already doing to keep in contact with individuals at risk and to provide safe spaces where they can get support. These are all vital foundations for an effective response system.

It is important to recognize, however, that communities need adequate resources to sustain these activities. We frequently heard about the high levels of burnout of service providers in this critical work.

**6. It is also clear from the discussions that police in Manitoba are not trusted to act quickly and effectively when an Indigenous woman, girl or gender diverse person goes missing.** We heard numerous examples of situations where a friend or family member have been deterred to go to police to file a report as they do not trust the police to follow up or provide services. We also heard examples of racist incidence of police responding rudely or insensitively to families and friends in crisis. These concerns are compounded by the fact that many communities are served by RCMP detachments located far away where there is no opportunity for police to build knowledge of the communities they are meant to serve or to establish relationships of trust.

Of particular concern, we heard accounts in every session of police telling friends and family members they had to wait 24 hours or longer before making a report. Such widespread

accounts of police discouraging or turning away missing persons reports raises concerns that police are not properly trained on their own policies or procedures, don't recognize the urgency of taking action when a vulnerable person goes missing, or are indifferent to the safety and well-being of Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse persons.

**7. Participants emphasized the need for clear criteria setting out when a Red Dress Alert should be issued and the steps that will be taken as a result.** Everyone involved needs to be made aware of and trained in their responsibilities. The criteria need to be widely publicized so that members of the public know what to expect. The expectations of how police and other government agencies should respond must also be written into law so that there is clear accountability.

**8. Any alert system will require cooperation and coordination across jurisdictions and among agencies.** Critical dynamics highlighted throughout the engagement process included:

- Youth who run away from foster care;
- Gender based violence, including intimate partner violence;
- People experience housing insecurity;
- Individuals who go missing after travelling from a remote or northern community to an urban center;
- Individuals who are in positions of heightened vulnerability after leaving a hospital or other institution far from their homes; and
- Individuals trafficked that could be across borders.

**9. Important concerns around data collection and information-sharing need to be addressed.** Information already collected by various government agencies could help locate missing persons. Confidentiality concerns hinder the use of these tools or sharing with a family member or friend if a person is safe. At the same, we heard from participants that systems of data collection and sharing are not reflective of Indigenous community concerns over potential misuse of data and do not respect Indigenous sovereignty. Enabling legislation for the Red Dress Alert needs to enable effective flow of information while addressing the rights and concerns of Indigenous Peoples.

**10. Concerns were raised about the potential that frequent use of various forms of alerts could desensitize the public and undermine their usefulness.** Recommendations were made to look at the experience in Manitoba with the existing Amber Alert system as well as how alerts have been used in other jurisdictions.

## **Next steps**

Based on the key themes set out above, it is clear that the federal, provincial and municipal governments must move quickly to establish the conditions for a Red Dress Alert system to work effectively. This includes allocation of sufficient multi-year funding and adopting enabling legislation and regulations to ensure all relevant government agencies cooperate with and contribute to the effective implementation of such a system.

Giganawenimaanaanig is calling on the federal and provincial governments to take all necessary actions to ensure that an effective, Indigenous-led, culturally safe and trauma informed Red Dress Alert system is in place by May 2026 at the latest.

Giganawenimaanaanig will issue a summary of its survey reports in mid-June and full report of its engagement sessions by the end of July. We will be pursuing meetings with relevant government departments and agencies as soon as possible.

We are planning to release our final report on October 4, 2025. That report will include specific proposals for federal and provincial implementation legislation and other critical recommendations for timely and effective implementation of a Red Dress Alert.

We will meet with technology providers to determine the most effective system to meet the needs of our communities.

## **Background**

On 2 May 2023, Members of Parliament unanimously consented to a motion proposed by Winnipeg Centre MP Leah Gazan calling on the government to:

- (a) declare the continued loss of Indigenous women, girls and two spirit people a Canada-wide emergency; and
- (b) provide immediate and substantial investment, including in a red dress alert system, to help alert the public when an Indigenous woman, girl or two spirit person goes missing.

As a result of that motion, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (Committee) launched a study of the most effective and efficient manner to operate, administer, and control a Red Dress Alert system in Canada. The Committee met with expert witness, families and survivors of MMIWG and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples, organizations, police officers, various federal departments, and received written submissions. Giganawenimaanaanig provided a written submission to the Committee.

In September 2024, the House of Commons Standing Committee presented its report – *IMPLEMENTING A RED DRESS ALERT IN CANADA* – with 17 recommendations. The report stated



that these recommendations were intended to “ensure that the implementation of a Red Dress Alert is effective, Indigenous-led, and meets the needs of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, their families and their communities across Canada.”<sup>1</sup>

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada organized sixteen national pre-engagement sessions between December 2023 and January 2024 to gather preliminary feedback on the potential implementation of a Red Dress Alert. This was led by prominent advocates for the Indigenous women and girls including Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, Chair of the National Family and Survivor’s Circle Inc.; Sandra DeLaronde, Chair of Giganawenimaanaanig; and MPs Leah Gazan and Pam Damoff. The pre-engagement sessions were held across Canada with national Indigenous organizations, regional and urban organizations, technical experts, family members and Survivors, and grassroots service providers.

On October 4, 2024 the Government of Canada and the Province of Manitoba announced that they were partnering with and entrusting Giganawenimaanaanig to develop an Indigenous-led Red Dress Alert System Pilot in Manitoba. To support the project, the federal government invested \$1.3 million for the development phase.

The Red Dress Alert Project Team was established in December 2024 to begin planning and developing ways to conduct the project in a way that is Indigenous-led, respectful, rooted in cultural competency, community empowerment and trauma-informed healing for justice. On December 13, 2024, Giganawenimaanaanig held the inaugural gathering of Red Dress Alert Bundle Carriers made up of First Nations and Métis families and survivors from various regions of Manitoba.

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<sup>1</sup> IMPLEMENTING A RED DRESS ALERT IN CANADA - Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, September 2024 p.ix