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Subject: CJC Engagement - What We Heard Report

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Dear valued Albertan stakeholders and participant,

The Ministry of Justice is excited to release the “What We Heard” Report detailing the outcomes of the Community Justice Center (CJC) engagement conducted from September 2022 and April 2023. As introduced in the engagement sessions, CJsCs present a distinctive and innovative approach to justice in communities. These centers, akin to a community court model, integrate judicial practices with diverse social services to address the underlying causes of crime. Through the integration of various justice initiatives into a unified program and the provision of interconnected services within a single facility, CJsCs strive to diminish reoffending, fortify community bonds, and improve public safety and well-being. Moreover, these community-driven spaces are designed to flexibly and collaboratively address each community's specific needs, offering opportunities to tackle social inequities and promote holistic solutions.

The “What We Heard” Report has brought to light a multitude of recurring themes voiced by stakeholders and participants, underscoring the imperative need for attention in the event that Alberta moves forward with the development and implementation CJsCs. Additionally, as highlighted in the Report, it encompasses subsequent themes identified during Indigenous engagement sessions, providing insight on additional perspectives from an Indigenous lens.

The feedback obtained during the CJC engagement sessions has been formally submitted to the federal government. While there has not been any announcements or provided updates regarding the possibility of CJsCs in Alberta, the Ministry of Justice sincerely appreciates your active participation and insights on this matter. The Ministry of Justice highly values the feedback you have provided, recognizing the importance of your insights in shaping the direction of upcoming projects with similar goals; your input will be thoughtfully considered to enhance the planning and execution of future initiatives.

With sincere thanks and gratitude,

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Community Justice Center Engagement

What We Heard Report



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Executive Summary

In January 2020, Justice Canada's Justice Partnership and Innovation Program invited provinces and territories to apply for funding to support a Community Justice Centres (CJC) engagement to inform a broader federal CJC strategy and funding model. In May 2022, Alberta Justice's Strategy, Support, and Integrated Initiatives (SSII) Division, Community Justice and Integrated Services, in consultation with the Community and Stakeholder Engagement Branch, received approval to conduct CJC engagement sessions with community and professional stakeholders across the province of Alberta.

CJCs are rooted in community justice, an innovative strategic and philosophical alternative to the formal justice system. Community justice can resemble a community court model that connects contemporary judicial practices to other forms of social services to address the root causes of crime, reduce reoffending, strengthen community bonds, and improve public safety and community well-being. The design of CJCs often integrates several justice initiatives under a singular program and offers interconnected services within a single facility. CJCs are community-driven spaces tailored to meet each community's unique and diverse needs. This flexible approach creates meaningful opportunities to address social inequities, marginalization, and oppression in a holistic and collaborative way.

The engagement sessions aimed to introduce the concept of CJCs and gather feedback on how CJCs could and should look within various Alberta contexts, including large and medium urban municipalities and First Nations and Metis Settlements. Between September 2022 and April 2023, 37 engagement sessions were held, some conducted in-person and others conducted virtually. Additionally, pre-established focus points were used to help guide the conversation, including discussions on the current state of Alberta Justice, innovation, systems thinking, and future planning. A description of these focus points will be provided in this report.

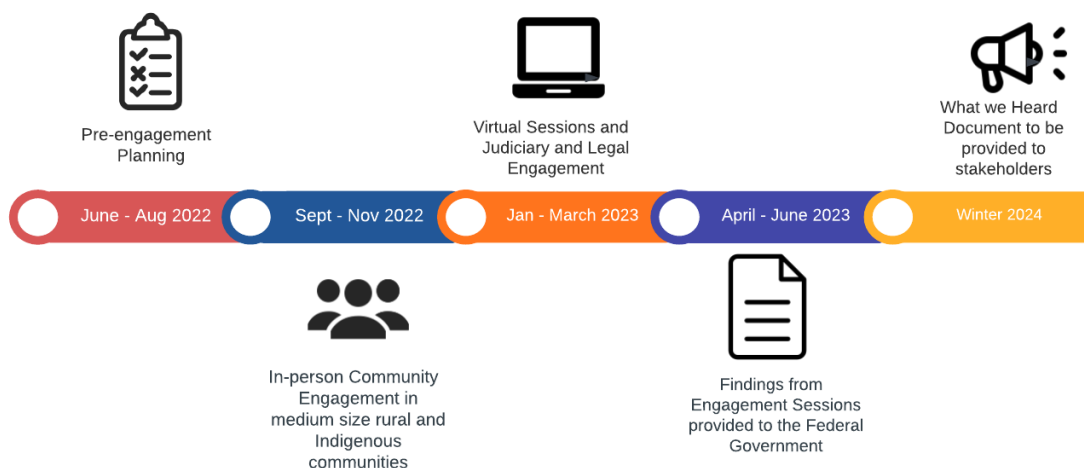
Participants included representatives from law enforcement, Alberta municipalities, non-governmental organizations, other government ministries, the judiciary, legal groups, and community stakeholders, including groups representing culturally and ethnically diverse groups. Additionally, separate engagement sessions were held with Indigenous communities to better understand their unique experiences with approaches to justice and to discuss opportunities to reform the criminal justice system to be more culturally sensitive.

This report summarizes what was heard during the engagement sessions, resulting in six recurring themes from the non-Indigenous sessions. These themes include funding, needs responsibility, community-led and controlled, increased use of diversion and restorative justice, expansion of existing services, and evaluation. From the Indigenous sessions, the most prevalent themes included funding, Indigenous-led initiatives, the differences between westernized restorative justice and Indigenous restorative justice, and repairing harm and trust. All of themes will be individually addressed in this report.

The engagement sessions served as an exploratory exercise into the viability of CJCs, as Alberta does not have any current programs that would be considered a CJC. Upon completion of the

engagement sessions, a report of findings was developed and provided to the federal government for review to move forward with the potential expansion of CJs in Alberta.

CJC Engagement Timeline:



CJC Engagement Process:

Pre-engagement activities took place between June and August 2022, and included the development of a cross-ministry expert working group. The working group included representatives from Community Engagement and Strategy and Community Justice and Integrated Services. The working group met consistently throughout this period, having collaborative discussions, and integrating unique perspectives to ensure the CJC engagement sessions were conducted inclusively and equitably.

The working group established a set of principles to be used as a framework for conducting the engagement sessions. The first principle focused on fostering inclusivity by inviting stakeholders and the public to represent groups of cultural and ethnic diversity, including First Nation and Métis Settlements. The second involved providing a safe space for exploring ideas and empowering stakeholders to propose solutions and recommendations that align with principles for performance standard establishment. The final principle held that adhering to cultural competency increases the government's capacity to understand stakeholders' experience with approaches to justice.

Stakeholders

The working group helped identify and create an inventory of stakeholders who should be included in the CJC engagement sessions. This process also included establishing a general timeline and strategy to conduct the CJC engagement sessions across the province to ensure participants had an equal opportunity to participate.

Building the list of stakeholders to be invited to the CJC engagement sessions began with compiling lists of agencies that previously received funding for Crime Prevention, Guns and Gangs, Restorative Justice Projects, and Youth Justice Committees. The working group identified more than 400 stakeholders and consolidated their names with additional identifiable stakeholders.

The stakeholders represented law enforcement (police, peace officers), organizations representing municipalities (e.g., Alberta Municipalities), non-governmental organizations (e.g., organizations working on restorative justice, crime prevention, hate crime suppression), social service agencies (e.g., organizations working with individuals experiencing homelessness, mental health and addiction concerns, victims of human trafficking), other government ministries (e.g., Seniors, Community and Social Services, Health, Children and Family Services, Education), the judiciary, legal groups (e.g., Legal Aid, Criminal Defense Lawyers Association), and community groups representing cultural and ethnic diversity (e.g., groups promoting gender and sexual diversity, faith-based groups, groups representing multiculturalism, Indigenous organizations, and linguistic groups). Representatives involved with case development groups were also invited, including police officers and Alberta Health Services Representatives. Case development groups are collaborative and pursue the goal of cohesive case planning between various disciplines to reduce recidivism and increase community safety.

The stakeholder list was validated by other Government of Alberta ministries (e.g., the former Ministry of Labour and Immigration, Arts, Culture and Status of Women, Seniors, Community and Social Services, Indigenous Relations) to ensure the views of key stakeholders were represented. Invitations encouraged the invited groups/communities to send two representatives to the available sessions.

Methods for Participation

From September 2022 to April 2023, 37 engagement sessions were completed, involving a total of approximately 590 participants. Email invitations were sent containing information for all in-person sessions, inviting stakeholders to register for the session in their area. Stakeholders were also encouraged to suggest additional stakeholders who may want to attend. Invitations went out at least two weeks in advance. Locations were selected to fit as wide a range of urban, rural, and Indigenous contexts as possible. Several sessions were explicitly geared toward representatives from Indigenous organizations and communities; however, invitees were also welcome to attend any other session on the list. Written submissions were encouraged if participants could not participate in the in-person or virtual sessions.

The working group identified four focus areas, which helped structure the conversation of the engagement sessions:

- The current state of how justice is delivered in Alberta, including its strengths and potential areas of improvement.
- Existing innovative programming in Alberta, and how CJsCs could be integrated into the current system.
- Governance structure and identification of service providers and stakeholders needed for CJC development.
- Future planning, including guiding principles of a CJC, outcomes, gaps, and solutions to the gaps.

A roundtable discussion with prompting questions ensured all attendees had space to contribute their thoughts and opinions to reflect their local context.

In-person Sessions: Fourteen in-person sessions in small, medium, and large urban centers were conducted. This allowed for an Alberta-wide perspective on CJsCs. These sessions were held in English from September to November 2022. These sessions took place in St. Paul, Lloydminster, Cold Lake, Peace River, Grande Prairie, Airdrie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Fort McMurray, Lac La Biche, Drayton Valley, Wetaskiwin, and Red Deer. Each session was approximately three hours in length to permit time to introduce the notion of CJsCs, discuss the four focus points, and allow space for discussion and questions.

Virtual Sessions: Four virtual sessions were facilitated in January and February 2023, including one French-language session. These sessions were intended for those in larger municipalities such as Edmonton and Calgary, but attendees from previous in-person sessions were able to attend as well. Participants were also provided a brief overview of CJsCs, including domestic and international examples, before their selected session to create more discussion time. The virtual sessions were up to two hours in length and included a breakout room feature to ensure all participants had an opportunity to speak and engage in conversation. Thirteen further virtual engagement sessions were completed with professional stakeholders between February and April 2023. This included the judiciary and other legal interest groups.

Indigenous Sessions: From September 2022 until April 2023, six engagement sessions were also held in Indigenous communities, representing Treaty 7 from Blackfoot Confederacy, Stoney Nakoda Tsuut'ina Nations (G4), Bigstone Cree Nation from Treaty 8, Native Counselling Services of Alberta, and Métis Nation of Alberta. Additionally, Indigenous sessions were also offered in Fort McMurray and Peace River. In preparation for these sessions, Indigenous stakeholders were provided domestic and international examples of CJsCs using an Indigenous lens. These sessions helped better understand their communities' experiences with current approaches to justice, the strengths, and limitations of the current approach in their community or municipality where their members access justice services. Opportunities for Indigenous courts and new justice initiatives within each community were also discussed.

Post-Engagement Session Steps: After the completion of the engagement sessions, the findings were provided to the Federal Government. This included the recurring themes and top takeaways regarding areas for further consideration in the development and sustainability of CJs in Alberta.

CJC Engagement Stakeholders

The following tables provide details on the dates, locations, and number of participants for municipal, First Nations, Métis, virtual, and professional stakeholder engagement sessions:

In-person Municipalities Engagement Sessions

Engagement Session	Community	Target Group(s)	Date	Number of Attendees (Including facilitators)
1	St. Paul	Community Stakeholders	09/20/2022	12
2	Lloydminster	Community Stakeholders	09/21/2022	6
3	Cold Lake	Community Stakeholders	09/22/2022	17
4	Peace River	Community Stakeholders	09/27/2022	18
6	Grand Prairie	Community Stakeholders	09/29/2022	18
7	Airdrie	Community Stakeholders	10/18/2022	26
8	Lethbridge	Community Stakeholders	10/18/2022	14
9	Medicine Hat	Community Stakeholders	10/19/2022	11
10	Fort McMurray	Community Stakeholders	10/25/2022	11
11	Lac La Biche	Community Stakeholders	10/26/2022	16
12	Drayton Valley	Community Stakeholders	11/07/2022	13

13	Wetaskiwin	Community Stakeholders	11/08/2022	19
14	Red Deer	Community Stakeholders	11/09/2022	9

Virtual Municipalities Engagement Sessions

Engagement Session	Community	Target Group(s)	Date	Number of Attendees (Including facilitators)
1	Provincial wide	Community Stakeholders	01/20/23	65
2	Provincial Francophone Community	Community Stakeholders	01/26/23	9
3	Provincial wide	Community Stakeholders	02/03/23	55
4	Provincial wide	Community Stakeholders	02/24/23	45

Indigenous Communities Engagement Sessions

Engagement Session	Community	Target Group(s)	Date	Number of Attendees (Including facilitators)
1	Peace River	Indigenous Stakeholders	09/28/22	4
2	Fort McMurray	Indigenous Stakeholders	10/25/22	12
3	Tsuut'ina Stoney Nakoda Nations (G4)	Indigenous Stakeholders	11/16/22	7
4	Métis Nation of Alberta	Indigenous Stakeholders	11/22/22	12
5	Blackfoot Confederacy	Indigenous Stakeholders	04/12/23	8
6	Bigstone Cree Nation	Indigenous Stakeholders	04/26/23	30

Professional Stakeholder Engagement Sessions

Engagement Session	Community	Target Group(s)	Date	Number of Attendees (Including facilitators)
1	Alberta Court of Justice	Professional Stakeholders	02/07/23	4
2	Legal-Aid Alberta	Professional Stakeholders	02/28/23	9
3	Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police	Professional Stakeholders	02/03/23	25
4	Alberta Crown Prosecution Service	Professional Stakeholders	02/07/23	12
5	Criminal Defence Lawyers Association & Criminal Trial Lawyers Association	Professional Stakeholders	03/21/23	1
6	Alberta Family Lawyers Association	Professional Stakeholders	03/27/23	6
7	Native Counselling Services of Alberta	Professional Stakeholders	04/05/23	35
8	Public Prosecution Service of Canada	Professional Stakeholders	04/20/23	6
9	Canadian Bar Association – Criminal Justice	Professional Stakeholders	04/24/23	7
10	Court of King's Bench of Alberta	Professional Stakeholders	04/25/23	7
11	Canadian Bar Association – Family & Civil	Professional Stakeholders	04/25/23	35

guide the establishment of CJs in their communities or for their membership. For example, an Indigenous-led CJC might not be termed a “CJC” and instead bear a name developed by the community and which would better reflect their culture and practices. Indigenous-led CJs may also use different names, language, and terminology, especially about position titles, as the notion of Justice can have negative connotations. These efforts speak to cultural competency while avoiding the traditional punitive techniques of Justice.

2. The Importance of Funding: *“We should have the discretion on where to allocate funding based on the community’s needs”* – Indigenous stakeholder participant.

Indigenous participants consistently raised the importance of funding. The need for a long-term commitment from the government to provide adequate funding was underscored; for example, a “generational funding” commitment lasting between 15 to 25 years to assess the sustainability and efficacy of CJs. Furthermore, long-term funding was described as helpful when it comes to identifying impacts, gaps, and where future programming development is needed. Indigenous participants noted that Indigenous-led CJs should have the discretion to develop a funding framework.

3. Indigenous vs. Westernized Restorative Justice: *“Our approach to RJ is a little different than others; it is nicer, kinder, but has never been given the light of day”* – Indigenous stakeholder participant.

The criminal justice system would continue to benefit from inclusion of culturally sensitive practices brought forward through Indigenous perspectives. For example, RJ is a longstanding cultural aspect of Indigenous communities; however, RJ is also delivered in the current criminal justice system in a way that reflects more Westernized and Eurocentric principles.

4. Repairing Trust and Building Relationships: *“CJs could increase trust between Indigenous communities and the justice system”* – Indigenous stakeholder participant.

There were frequent conversations surrounding Indigenous communities’ lack of trust and confidence in government throughout the engagement sessions. CJs were identified as a step in the right direction toward empowering Indigenous communities. Indigenous-led CJs may create feelings of safety and support for their members, as their frameworks adhere to grassroots approaches and place a greater emphasis on individual healing and addressing community harm.

Conclusion

This engagement aimed to gather diverse perspectives to inform the potential for CJs in the province of Alberta. Engagement with stakeholders involved in-person and virtual sessions that were guided by predetermined focus points while also allowing space for discussion and questions. Indigenous community engagement sessions also took place to provide a separate opportunity to discuss issues that specifically affect Indigenous peoples.

Overall, CJs were identified as a step in the right direction toward empowering communities to make transformative changes within the criminal justice system. The notion of CJs was

positively received amongst stakeholders, especially their capacity to support grassroots frameworks, their emphasis on individual healing, and their focus on repairing community harm. CJs were also well-received based on the possibility of returning the administration of justice services back to the community.

The identified themes from the engagement sessions shed light on where specific attention is required for developing and sustaining CJs throughout Alberta. The Government of Alberta values all the feedback they received during the engagement sessions. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who participated, particularly for their ongoing commitment to improving the criminal justice system to be more inclusive and equitable.