

**From:** Lindsey Zucchi <[Lindsey.Zucchi@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Lindsey.Zucchi@gov.ab.ca)>

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**To:** Anna Mariet <[Anna.Mariet@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Anna.Mariet@gov.ab.ca)>; Karen Korchinski <[karen.korchinski@gov.ab.ca](mailto:karen.korchinski@gov.ab.ca)>; Matthew Reid <[Matthew.Reid@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Matthew.Reid@gov.ab.ca)>

**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,

**Lindsey Zucchi** (she/her)  
Community and Program Liaison  
Community Safety Initiatives  
Justice Supports  
Strategy, Support and Integrated Initiatives  
Alberta Justice  
Ph: 825.945.1443  
Fax: 403.297.5934  
Email: [lindsey.zucchi@gov.ab.ca](mailto:lindsey.zucchi@gov.ab.ca)



# 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.

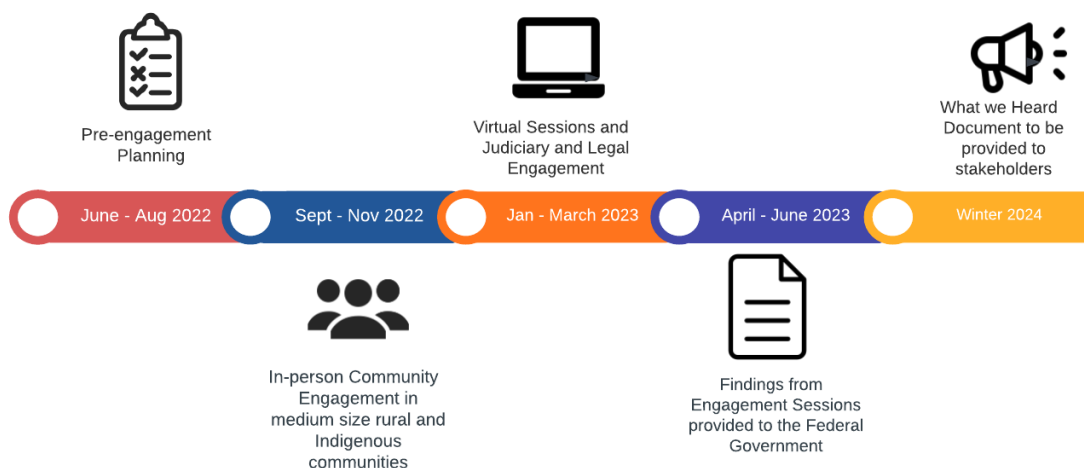
Participants included representatives from law enforcement, Alberta municipalities, non-governmental organizations, other government ministries, the judiciary, legal groups, and community stakeholders, including groups representing culturally and ethnically diverse groups. Additionally, separate engagement 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   |

|    |                        |                           |          |   |
|----|------------------------|---------------------------|----------|---|
| 12 | Alberta Law Foundation | Professional Stakeholders | 04/25/27 | 2 |
|----|------------------------|---------------------------|----------|---|

## ‘What We Heard’ Themes

The participants shared ideas on important factors requiring further attention and consideration. The following themes are summarized and translated into recommendations for the development and implementation of CJs in the province of Alberta.

**1. Consistent and Secure Funding:** *“Grants don’t work, take too much time from providing services to people, needs consistent, long-term funding so staff can focus on clients”* – participant from Grande Prairie.

Concerns over unreliable funding were raised in every engagement session, reflecting a sense of distrust and lack of confidence in government funding. Moreover, several participants acknowledged that inadequate funding impacts the sustainability and efficacy of community resources and services for vulnerable populations. Participants underscored that if CJs can achieve secure funding, this may be a step toward repairing the relationship between the government and the community.

Further, municipal representatives highlighted that if funding for a CJC were short-term, municipalities, Justice, and other social services might experience financial pressures to support the sustainability of CJC within their communities.

**2. Needs Responsivity:** *“There need to be integrated and open-door services, such as using system navigators”* – participant from Wetaskiwin.

Many participants highlighted the opportunity for CJs to be mindful of diversity, which requires holistic and flexible approaches to support marginalized groups. Participants strongly supported the concept of system navigators to address service gaps and connect individuals to the appropriate resources to facilitate meaningful outcomes (e.g., addressing individual risk factors). It was further recommended that system navigators be specific to the makeup of the community the CJC serves (e.g., Indigenous and cultural navigators) to ensure cultural connection. Many participants highlighted that in-person services should be prioritized; however, the benefits of technology (e.g., virtual services) can also be a huge asset to a CJC. (CCTV and virtual programming were described as ways to address transportation and attendance issues, especially for isolated and remote communities.) However, some participants raised concerns about connectivity issues in rural regions which might prevent access to virtual programming.

Many of the professional stakeholders underscored the stigma many communities associate with the physical building of a courthouse. It was suggested that the CJC’s location should reflect a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive atmosphere to protect individuals from being triggered and re-traumatized.

The concept of “wrap-around” services was identified as a need in many justice contexts--not just in the criminal justice stream, especially concerning custody to community reintegration, but also

in family law and civil law matters where integrated supports for child custody, protection orders, and landlord-tenancy are needed. Many participants acknowledged the gaps in the system, such as access to treatment and housing, resulting in a perpetual cycle of “catch and release.”. Another common theme was the lack of client-centred frameworks, contributing to long wait times, transportation barriers, and limited resources that result in ineffective social services. Several participants stressed that CJsCs must develop inclusive, user-friendly, and barrier-free services, especially for services that work with diverse populations, such as the French-speaking community. The integration of health and wellness into social services was frequently raised, resulting in a suggestion for CJsCs to be used for civil and family matters.

Numerous participants spoke to formal needs assessments as a necessary tool at the onset of individuals’ entrance into the CJC. While it was recognized that having a breadth of services available at the CJC would be positive, not having a standardized approach to assessment would leave gaps in service and lead to inefficiencies. System navigators were identified as suitable positions to administer such needs assessments. They could then use the information gained and rapport built during assessment interviews to better tailor case plans and identify appropriate services for the individual.

**3. Community-led:** *“The budget needs to be community controlled – the resources need to be closer to home”* – participant from St. Paul.

While many participants highlighted that CJsCs should be government-led, they also underscored that their operational structure and framework should be community-driven and this requires a collaborative relationship between grassroots organizations and governments. Discussing the community-led approach yielded themes and ideas such as wrap-around services, needs assessments, complex client case development/management groups, and meaningful collaboration.

Multi-disciplinary case development groups appeared to be highly prioritized in rural and urban communities, especially amongst interest groups that provide services to high-risk individuals with chronic offending. These groups are found in Alberta’s specialized courts and policing models and provide collaborative and cohesive case planning between various disciplines to reduce the prevalence of recidivism and increase community safety. Participants identified multi-disciplinary groups within CJsCs as beneficial, as their processes can better support marginalized groups by addressing criminality and other social justice issues. Therefore, these groups can be used as a model or jumping-off point for CJsCs, as they already use interdisciplinary processes, including collaborations between law enforcement, health, and social service agencies.

Meaningful collaboration between community and justice stakeholders was a recurring theme from the engagement sessions, as inconsistent processes between service providers can negatively impact the quality and delivery of the services. Many participants suggested that a coordinated policy and framework, especially in the context of information sharing, could be beneficial. Furthermore, the need for a coordinating group or organization was identified as a necessity to encourage stakeholders to work together. Participants were interested in CJsCs having a program/project manager to oversee day-to-day operations and the management of involved stakeholders to ensure that their services are fully integrated with one another.

**4. Inclusion of Restorative Justice (RJ) and Diversion:** *“CJC would benefit from applying a humanitarian model of Justice while reflecting principles of restorative justice”* – legal representative participant.

Participants described that CJsCs must reflect a victim-, offender-, and community-centred approach. Many participants shared their belief that RJ and diversionary principles can make meaningful changes in the legal system and that the lack of early intervention and proactive programming to support vulnerable populations is a major issue. Participants underscored that should CJC be developed, RJ, diversion, mediation, and early intervention should be considered fundamental practices.

**5. Expansion of Existing Practices:** *“There is no need to create something new. Come with a mandate and funding, and the community will come together to make it happen”* – participant from Lethbridge.

Many community practices apply trauma-informed and client-centred principles when working with vulnerable groups. Several participants advocated that existing services need not be reinvented but instead require financial support to increase their capacity to reach marginalized populations. Equity was a frequently used term, especially in rural communities, as consistent service access was identified as an ongoing barrier. Further feedback acknowledged that if CJsCs were to expand services, an assessment of the impact on other stakeholders and could mitigate these effects would be necessary. (For instance, the expansion of resources may add pressure and widen the scope of front-line staff to provide services to CJC users.)

**6. Importance of Planning and Evaluation:** *“A need assessment uncovers what actual needs look like and what they cost”* – participant from Fort McMurray.

Many participants proposed a community readiness assessment as a first step, as this process can provide insight into how CJsCs should operate to best serve their community while uncovering gaps to identify transformative goals. Participants further suggested that an evaluative framework should be a top priority as this will distinguish how evaluative tools, such as qualitative and quantitative methods, will be utilized. The notion of outcome measurement and success was also raised; this would require an operational definition at each CJC. Reduced recidivism rates, increased wellness for clients, and improved access to services were common examples of evaluative benchmarks participants suggested during the engagement sessions.

## ‘What We Heard’ Themes from Indigenous Sessions

**1. Indigenous-led Initiatives:** *“Partnering with systems that are inherently racist makes the trust building difficult – needs to be by Métis for Métis”* – Métis stakeholder participant.

Engagement sessions with Indigenous groups provided clear insight into how Indigenous traditions and customs must be honoured and prioritized in future justice initiatives. Efforts should be made to make the current criminal justice system more inclusive of Indigenous needs while creating opportunities for Indigenous-led programming. Indigenous participants underscored the importance of providing space for Indigenous communities and leadership to self-govern and

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.