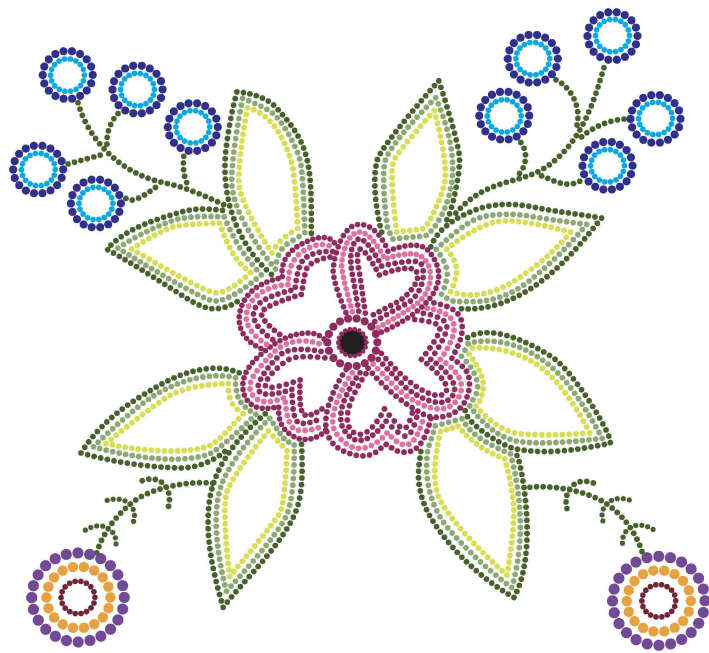


LES FEMMES MICHIF OTIPEMISIWAK

Building Bridges Across Services and Needs: A Métis Youth Mental Wellness Policy Initiative 2026

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN: MENTAL WELLNESS
SERVICES AVAILABLE TO MÉTIS YOUTH





Purpose:

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LFMO) conducted an environmental scan to determine what mental wellness services were available to youth across the Métis motherland. Our search returned an extensive list of services available to Métis youth with a variety of needs, but few results of programs and services designed by, for, or delivered by Métis organizations. This search aims to identify gaps and strengths in services available to Métis youth, while taking an intersectional approach. An intersectional lens ensures that mental wellness needs are considered within the context of overlapping and interacting social identities (i.e. gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexuality). These identities impact access to and experiences within mental wellness care. The results will be used to guide further engagements with Métis communities, especially youth, and determine targeted areas of policy development and advocacy.

Methodology:

In our initial search, we found an academic article published by Perez et al. (2024) which had significant overlap with our purpose. We used the results of that article to create a spreadsheet of all listed programs and determined which ones Métis youth could access. We determined 'access' to mean that a Métis person could attend the program or access the service because it was either 1) Métis-specific, 2) was open to all Indigenous people or 3) was open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. As we explain later, the one program from the initial search which was for Métis people was provided by the Métis Nation of Ontario, which requires citizenship in that province to access.

We completed a secondary targeted environmental scan looking for Métis-specific programs across the Métis motherland through Google. Our search terms were:

- ∞ "Metis" AND "Youth" AND "Mental" AND "Program" followed by each province or "National"
- ∞ "Metis" AND "Youth" AND "Mental" AND "Service" followed by each province or "National"

We found an additional 6 programs specifically for Métis people, and some specifically for youth. To note, some of these services require citizenship with the Métis provincial government where the services are offered.

The results from this search list are not exhaustive and are likely to capture programs with enough funding and awareness to be easily found on the internet. Therefore, we welcome the addition of any programs and services that fit within the scope to be added as an addendum.

Findings:

Of the 117 programs identified by the original environmental scan (Perez et al., 2024), 68 (58%) were found to be accessible for Métis people. Of these programs and services, only one (1%) was Métis-specific, and was provided through the Métis Nation of Ontario. This program would require provincial citizenship to access. Of the 68 programs Métis people could access, nine were accessible for Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and 35 (51%) offered services to all Indigenous people. 10 programs were targeted for the urban Indigenous population.



Our secondary environmental scan searching for Métis-specific programming across Canada found an additional six programs. Only two programs were not affiliated with a provincial Métis government. Both were provided through family services organizations.

Conclusion:

There are significant gaps in programs and services available specifically for Métis youth. A majority of Métis-specific programming is provided through Métis governments, and focuses on clinical therapy (including addictions-specific therapy and psychological assessments) and system navigation. We found that most counselling services from Métis governments were not youth-specific.

OVERVIEW OF MÉTIS-SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

We chose to focus on Métis-specific services to illustrate the gap many Métis youth, families, healthcare workers, and researchers are already aware of - there are very few services designed to address the needs of Métis youth. Seven agencies or programs were identified; five were provincial Métis governments, and two were affiliated with child and family services.

Métis Nation of British Columbia (MNBC)

- **Métis Counselling Connections Program:** Provides funding for counselling (individual, group, and family), psychological and psychiatric assessments or testing, and substance use treatment up to a maximum for \$2000. Services must be provided by a registered service provider. Applicants must be registered within the MNBC central registry and reside in British Columbia. There is no age limit.
- **Wild Wisdom:** Healing with Nature: A seasonal webinar series led by two wellness committees within MNBC, including the youth Aansaamb ni Wiichihitononaaan committee. Virtual sessions began being hosted in April 2025, with four sessions planned to explore how nature is related to mental wellness. Sessions are facilitated by Métis knowledge holders. The sessions were not youth specific.
- **24/7 Métis Crisis Line:** A crisis line for all Métis Citizens. Available at 1-833-Metis-BC (1-833-638-4722).
- **Youth Mental Wellness Coordinators:** Provides support to Métis youth navigating mental health and substance use systems.

Otipemisiwak Métis Government (formerly the the Métis Nation of Alberta)

- **Cultural Enrichment Program:** Designed to provide opportunities for youth up to age 29 to experience their culture and foster a strong sense of identity. Examples included fiddling and jigging lessons, and workshops for beading and finger weaving.
- **Virtual Programming:** A Youtube channel specifically for youth programming has been created for youth to access videos about culture and activities within the OMG.
- **Life Skills Program:** Programs designed to give Métis youth up to age 29 important life skills for their own personal development and resilience. Examples include cooking lessons, hunter education programming, and a podcast.



- **Community Wellness Advocates:** Community Wellness Advocates provide Métis people aged 16 and older with support through providing information, referrals to programs, advocacy, and assistance with system navigation.
- **Ni Natoohtaan (I Listen) Psychology Benefit Program:** Provides funding to Métis Citizens in Alberta for up to 12 sessions (up to \$225 per session) with a psychologist or social worker. Applicants must be a resident of Alberta, have a pre-existing relationship with a licensed psychologist or social worker, and can only access the funding once. 100 enrollments occur each year.
- **Wellness Program:** Provided in partnership with Alberta Blue Cross and Homewood Health. Métis Citizens of Alberta with a citizenship number can access the program. Counsellors provide sessions over the phone, video, or through instant messaging. The number of sessions Citizens can access depends on their reason for calling, and is determined in part by the counsellor on the phone.

Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MN-S)

- **Mental Wellness and Addictions Program:** Provides a range of supports including individual counselling, family therapy, financial counselling, therapy for digital dependence or gambling, mental health and addictions assessments, and case coordination. Citizens are allotted three free sessions.
- **Métis Patient Support Workers:** Provide support to Métis individuals and families by providing information about internal and external resources, advocating for patient needs, providing translation services, connecting patients to Elders, and working with the healthcare system. This program is not mental wellness specific.
- **Wellness Through Our Lands (WTOL) Program, Miyooayaan Aansaamb (Wellness Together):** Provides funding to MN-S locals to provide culturally appropriate, trauma informed community-based healing and wellness services. The funding centers around land-based practices. Up to \$365,000 is available for locals. Programming must support Métis Elders, youth, families, 2SLGBTQIA+, and other citizens.

Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF)

- **Mental Health Initiatives:** Under their community health programming, MMF provides the following supports:
- **Mental Wellness Support Line:** Provides free support for Citizens. Available at 1-833-390-1041.
- **Grief and Loss Program:** An 8-week program supporting Citizens identify and address emotions related to grief and loss.
- **Citizen Support Program:** A Mental Health Case Coordinator provides Citizens with confidential assistance and connection to local resources.
- **Youth Programs:** The MMF provides opportunities for youth to connect with culture and develop life skills, outdoor skills, and arts-based programming. There is an annual Elders and Youth gathering that fosters intergenerational learning.



Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO)

- **Community Support Services (CSS) Program:** CSS Coordinators can provide MNO Citizens with support around system navigation, filling out forms, friendly visits, and medical transport support.
- **Mental Health and Addictions Program:** Available to Citizens of all ages. Services include in-person, telephone, and video support. Services offered include system navigation, mental health and addictions assessments, individual counselling, and family therapy.

Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services - Kamloops, BC

- A Métis child and family services agency that offers youth programming and residential services.
- **Lii Bufloo Zheen Moond Enn Baand Daafayr (Buffalo Youth Group)** - For Métis youth aged 14 and up. Involves land and cultural-based activities, such as responsible harvesting and outdoor recreation programming.
- **Community Events:** Beading, jigging, community gatherings and meals, and celebrations of Métis events (such as Louis Riel Day) are offered.
- **KIKÉKYELC (A place of belonging):** A 31 unit condo style development that houses Indigenous youth aged 16 to 27 alongside Elders. This was developed as a response to support youth who aged out of care. The cost of rent is \$550.00 a month, is 'dry housing', and does not allow overnight guests or pets. Programming is available on site for youth.
- **Michif CYMH (Child and Youth Mental Health) and Wellness Services:** This team provides counselling to child and youth up to aged 27, as well as couples and family counselling. Counselling is provided rooted in Métis values. Wellness groups include:
- **Riding the Rapids (DBT) Group:** A group counselling offering DBT-based skills and strategies. This group is for youth and young adults, and is offered seasonally over 12 weeks. Elders are involved in each session.
- **Youth Traditional Healing Camp:** The youth camp is offered once a season. It connects youth to their Métis values and knowledge. Youth learn how to honour themselves with traditional ceremonies and medicines.

Métis Family Services (MFS) - Surrey, BC

- **Cultural Activities Program:** Connects individuals and families to Elders, Métis Knowledge Holders, and Métis mentors for children and youth. A monthly calendar of events is posted and includes outings, gatherings for food, family nights, and cultural activities.
- **Youth Circle:** A weekly drop-in style program for Métis and Indigenous youth aged 12-18. The group is facilitated by a counselling program. Activities include recreational outings, cultural teachings and connections, and peer connection.
- **Elder Connections:** MFS works collaboratively with Elders and Knowledge Keepers to involve them in all programming. Individuals can access Elders for support, ceremony, and mentoring on a case-by-case basis.



- **Community Referrals:** MFS partners with other organizations and can make referrals to other services for youth in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

In assessing the Métis-specific programs, the five Métis governments focused on counselling, crisis lines, case management, and support workers to assist clients in service navigation. Some provinces had more cultural or land-based programs. Family service agencies offered similar services through counselling, but also offered more informal support such as youth groups and drop-in community events. However, we acknowledge that because these two agencies are associated with child and youth services, this could pose a significant barrier to youth who have had negative experiences in care.

Having access to culturally-safe care, including from therapists, psychologists, or psychiatrists is important to youth, and programs provided by Métis governments assist in covering the significant costs associated with it. However, at the time of our search, programs which provided funding for individuals to access counselling were all at capacity, suggesting it is fulfilling a need within the community, and identifying a need for further funding or alternative models to ensure continuous access. The requirement for individuals to be Citizens of each provincial government to access services poses an obstacle for individuals who may face barriers to apply for citizenship. Spots available in these programs are limited. From an intersectional framework, mental wellness is something supported holistically which considers the many aspects of wellness, the focus on counselling may only provide care to one domain.

Case coordinators or service navigators were also provided by nearly all agencies, and can help youth and their families connect with different resources locally. Service navigation can be complicated, time consuming, and overwhelming. Case coordinators can assist with finding many types of support including financial, housing, mental wellness, physical wellness, or cultural connection. However there is no guarantee that the community services available will be accessible, culturally-safe, or available without a long waitlist.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations are based on both the literature and engagements with LFMO's Youth Council. We recognize youth are experts in their current living experiences, and we seek to uplift their voices through our work.

Sustainable investment in programs specifically co-developed alongside Métis youth:

Métis youth want services that are created for them, where they are consulted meaningfully and can show up without barriers. There are a variety of programs across the Motherland, through friendship centres and health centres, that serve all Indigenous peoples. While these spaces can fulfill different domains of mental wellness, such as cultural connection, peer connection, or access to ceremonial knowledge - these may not be Métis-specific culture, peers, or knowledge. Programs that are co-developed with Métis youth from inception and that accurately reflect Métis knowledge are needed.



The LFMO Youth Council mentioned that programs which share traditional teachings around medicines for mental wellness were important to them. We envision programs which enable youth to access traditional medicines which support mental wellness, and the teachings that come from Elders and Knowledge Keepers about their proper use and care. Programs which offer this could connect youth to culture and community in addition to the medicines themselves. We support the creation of programs which facilitate the transfer of knowledge between generations.

Additionally, all services need to be invested in sustainably to support change. Existing services are overwhelmed by a high need, and clearly require more investment to benefit more people. Investment in upstream approaches to mental wellness are also recommended. Training more Métis service providers (both clinicians and non-clinical supports), building capacity in communities, and providing accessible funding opportunities for grassroots organizations are all examples.

Access to a broad scope of mental wellness service providers: Providing access to a broad range of service providers and professionals supports a holistic model of mental wellness. Service providers can include counsellors, Elders, dieticians, language teachers, mental health navigators, peer support, specialized physicians, community leaders and more. Due to significant waitlists already faced by existing programs and services, more substantial and sustainable funding is needed.

To support this recommendation, we suggest the creation or expansion of a directory of Métis service providers across the Nation. Youth seeking care across many domains can look for providers based on their geographic area and their required support. In knowing that all providers were Métis, youth could feel strong knowing that a service provider will understand their worldview.

Services provided are inclusive, accessible, safe, and culturally welcoming environments that support all aspects of wellness: The Métis-specific programming we found requires provincial citizenship or involvement with colonial systems (child welfare) to access. As youth seek to reconnect with their identity or understand what it means to be a modern Métis, resources that are designed to reduce barriers are needed. Youth deserve access to services that support their whole being - mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Programs should be low-barrier and with easy access to Elders and Knowledge Keepers to keep culture central.

The location where services are provided also matters to youth. Environments that are in unsafe areas, are far from transit, are physically inaccessible, or which don't allow for cultural engagement (such as access to a kitchen table, a fire, or the ability to smudge) do not fully meet the mental wellness needs of youth. Service providers and agencies should seek to ensure, even in urban settings, that aspects of culture and land can be incorporated into service delivery.



Program offerings that build on clinically focused services to include land-based, culturally-informed, and seasonal community-led gatherings: Métis Government Organizations are providing counselling services that help youth with a variety of their mental wellness needs. The inclusion of addictions-specific counselling or access to mental wellness assessments, in addition to individual counselling, is important and can assist youth in seeking out the care they need. However, the emphasis on clinical services illustrates that gap that other programs fill, which are land-based, community-based, and non-clinical services to support the continuum of mental wellness.

As in previous recommendations, the inclusion of Elders, culture, and land are essential to meeting the mental wellness needs of Métis youth. Métis people are seasonal, and we propose that future programming should focus on providing regular programming with teachings around the seasons. In addition to existing annual mental wellness retreats or summits, biweekly or monthly programming that supports gathering in a community-centered way could be culturally informed and cost effective.

Leadership or advocacy programming built-in to support peer and kin care: Métis youth will grow to be leaders, advocates, and Elders who carry our knowledge through to future generations. It is imperative programs are developed to support their journeys, including where they will go after they feel their mental wellness is supported. There is a need for capacity building within youth that is sustainable and meaningful, where power shifts back to youth to make changes in their lives and communities.

Currently, mental wellness programs focus on supporting youth at a point-in-time, and supporting traditional knowledge acquisition or cultural learning in some cases. The integration of leadership and advocacy training shifts further power back into the hands of youth to make changes in their own lives once they feel more grounded in their mental wellness and identity. Leadership training can support the development of self-confidence amongst youth, and assist in supporting their mental wellbeing through resilience and empowerment.

Contact:

Any communications about this document, or services to be added to the addendum, can be sent to research@metiswomen.org.

References:

Perez, S. H., Kakish, I., Brass, G., MacDonald, K., Mushquash, C., & Iyer, S. N. (2024). An environmental scan of mental health services for indigenous youth in Canada. *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 33(2), 93–130. Available from: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11201723/pdf/ccap33_p0093.pdf



Notes

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