



APRIL 25, 2026

ALBERTA INDIGENOUS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN ACTION (AIRJA) PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TRUE DIALOGUE RESTORTIVE JUSTICE CENTRE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alberta is at a critical juncture in advancing restorative justice as a core component of its justice and public safety system. The Alberta Indigenous Restorative Justice in Action (AIRJA) project has surfaced clear, actionable insights from Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners, Elders, Crown prosecutors, police, justices, probation, educators, and government partners. These insights point to a shared conclusion: restorative justice is delivering measurable public safety outcomes, but current funding and governance structures prevent the province from realizing its full system-wide benefits.

As the report states, “*restorative approaches reduce reoffending, improve victim satisfaction, and lower long-term system costs.*” These outcomes directly support Alberta Justice and Public Safety’s priorities related to community safety, victim support, system efficiency, and fiscal responsibility.

Strategic Context

Indigenous Restorative Justice as Core Justice Infrastructure

Indigenous restorative justice is not a cultural adaptation of Western justice. It is an expression of Indigenous legal orders and self-determination. The report emphasizes that “*Indigenous restorative justice is an expression of Indigenous self-determination and customary law,*” grounded in relational accountability and community well-being.

UNDRIP, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, and Canada’s Indigenous Justice Program all affirm Indigenous jurisdiction over justice processes. Aligning provincial policy with these commitments strengthens Alberta’s leadership in reconciliation and system transformation.

System Pressures and Public Safety Imperatives

Indigenous overrepresentation in Alberta’s justice and social systems remains among the highest in Canada. The report cites that “*47% of men sentenced to custody were Indigenous, 65% of women in the Edmonton Women’s Institution were Indigenous, and 74% of youth involved in the Child Welfare System were Indigenous.*” These disparities reflect structural issues that increase demand on courts, corrections, policing, and social services.

Restorative justice—particularly Indigenous-led models—addresses root causes such as trauma, disconnection, and breakdowns in kinship and community governance. Strengthening these pathways reduces downstream system costs and improves long-term public safety.

Current Structural Barriers

1. Short-Term, Competitive Funding

Alberta’s two grant streams (ARJG and YJC) are capped at \$50,000 and renewed annually. This creates instability, competition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous applicants, and high administrative burden. As the report notes, “*one-year grants do not support the long-term capacity building, governance stability, or intergenerational relationship building central to Indigenous customary law.*”

2. Limited Indigenous Governance Authority

Current funding supports service delivery but does not transfer decision-making authority to Indigenous Nations, the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, or Metis Settlements. This misalignment limits the effectiveness of Indigenous justice responses and is inconsistent with federal and international commitments.

3. Reporting Metrics Misaligned with Outcomes

Existing evaluation frameworks prioritize quantitative outputs (e.g., case volume) over relational, preventative, and healing-based outcomes that better reflect restorative justice's impact.

Strategic Opportunity for Alberta

Alberta has an opportunity to reposition restorative justice as a core justice service—aligned with mandate priorities, fiscal efficiency, and reconciliation commitments. Doing so would:

- Reduce pressure on courts, corrections, and policing
- Improve victim satisfaction and community safety
- Strengthen relationships with Indigenous governments
- Demonstrate alignment with UNDRIP and TRC Calls to Action
- Support long-term system transformation and cost avoidance

This shift is consistent with national and international advocacy calling for the redirection of justice resources toward Indigenous-led healing and community safety programs.

Key Recommendations

1. Transition Indigenous-Led RJ to Core, Multi-Year Funding

Move from annual grants to stable operational funding agreements. This enables predictable staffing, continuity, and long-term planning—critical for public safety outcomes.

2. Establish a Dedicated Indigenous-Led RJ Funding Stream

Create a permanent funding envelope governed by Indigenous-defined eligibility criteria. This reduces inequities created by competitive models and demonstrates concrete progress on reconciliation.

3. Embed Indigenous Governance Authority

Shift from participation to jurisdiction. Recognize Indigenous laws, accountability processes, and community-defined resolutions as legitimate justice outcomes within Alberta's public safety framework.

4. Align the Provincial RJ Strategy with UNDRIP

Embed self-determination across funding, governance, and policy. Conduct a policy review to remove structural barriers to Indigenous autonomy.

5. Co-Develop Culturally Grounded Evaluation Frameworks

Replace narrow quantitative metrics with Indigenous-informed measures of success, including relational healing, prevention, and community well-being.

6. Invest in Capacity Building and System Sustainability

Support leadership development, practitioner networks, provincial gatherings, and community-driven research. This strengthens the entire justice ecosystem and reduces reliance on custodial responses.

7. Formalize Ongoing Partnership with Indigenous Justice Networks

Ensure Indigenous leadership is embedded in governance, implementation, and continuous improvement of the Provincial RJ Strategy.

Conclusion

Strengthening Indigenous-led restorative justice is not only a reconciliation commitment—it is a public safety strategy, a fiscal strategy, and a system-transformation strategy. By shifting from short-term grants to core funding, embedding Indigenous governance, and aligning with UNDRIP, Alberta can build a more effective, accountable, and culturally grounded justice system.

As the report concludes, this work is essential to *“building safer communities and meaningfully addressing Indigenous overrepresentation and the cycle of violence—helping to end it within the next seven generations.”*