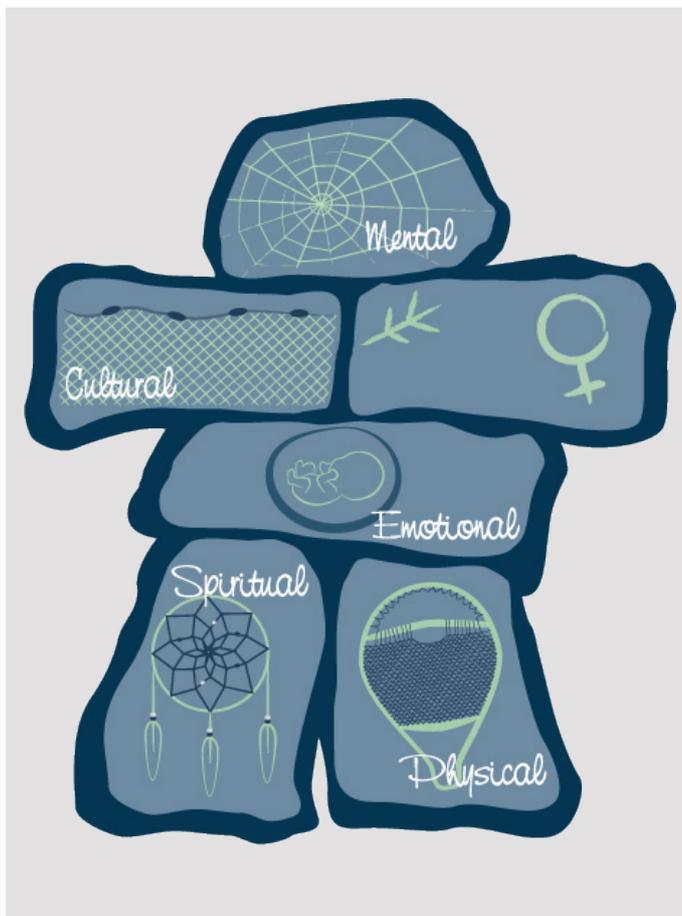


# The Wellbeing of Women-Identifying Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries in and around Happy Valley-Goose Bay

## Background<sup>1</sup>

In 2012, a group of diverse Inuit and settler women-identifying people in Happy Valley-Goose Bay (HV-GB), Labrador, came together to talk about women's wellbeing in the community, particularly considering changes that were anticipated because of the multibillion-dollar hydroelectric dam that was being built on the Lower Churchill River. In a series of workshops, they came together to describe and depict women's wellbeing as follows:



*"The wellbeing of women in the north depends on having the opportunity to enjoy and develop a healthy and sustainable relationship with the environment. Having the ability to value yourself – both where you have come from and where you are going – is also important. Wellbeing requires having a sense of safety and security, and having access to appropriate food, housing, resources, finances, and support services. Having a social support network, and being free from violent relationships are critical factors that affect wellbeing for all women. Food security; having or being able to learn coping mechanisms; being able to make choices about what's best for you and your family; having access to information and resources; and social acceptance of diverse social identities are also critically important factors that affect women's wellbeing. Having a space to meet to share and learn with other women is also important. Overall wellbeing is made up of: (1) physical; (2) emotional; (3) mental/intellectual; (4) spiritual; and (5) cultural wellbeing."*

To complement this definition, participants also developed definitions of each of the components of wellbeing. These are included throughout this report. In 2018, after several rounds of pilot testing, the group conducted a survey about the wellbeing of people in and around Happy Valley-Goose Bay across all five components of wellbeing. This report focuses on survey results from 45 women who identified as Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries. The included results – based on discussions with Nunatsiavut collaborators – present mostly quantitative data. Written responses are included where possible.

<sup>1</sup> This research took place in the Upper Lake Melville region of Labrador. We acknowledge these lands as the homelands of the Innu and Inuit of Labrador and recognize their ancestral and continued ties to these lands and waters. We also acknowledge that members of the research team live and work across several Indigenous territories of present-day Canada. This report was prepared by Amanda Buchnea, Annalise Kennedy, Jacqueline Gillis, and Leah Levac. Its contents were decided through ongoing discussions with Darlene Jacque. This report would not have been possible without the expertise and contributions of Inuit and settler women in Labrador who conceived the wellbeing framework, developed and piloted the survey, helped gather survey data, and participated in collaborative analysis sessions. This research was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

<sup>2</sup> The Inuksuk wellbeing framework was created by community researchers in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and digitized by graphic designer Monica Peach.

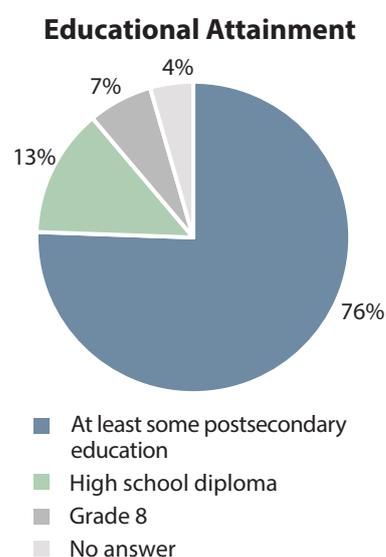
## Key Takeaways

- **Access to good, nutritious food, clean drinking water, and adequate, affordable housing was a challenge** for one-quarter (23%) to two-fifths (45%) of respondents.
- **Roughly 2 of every 5 women worried about meeting their basic needs at some point**, all citing lack of money and/or the cost of living as the reason.
- **Civic and political engagement were generally high amongst respondents**, including through participating in provincial and federal elections.
- **Women generally reported high levels of emotional wellbeing**, as well as receiving good emotional support from others.
- **Many women reported having spiritual practices and cultural traditions that were a positive part of their lives**, but also noted barriers to access.
- **93% of women felt they belonged in their community.**

## Demographics

The vast majority (89%; n=40) of respondents had been living in HV-GB for more than 5 years. While the survey was open to anyone over the age of 13, all 45 Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries who responded were over the age of 25. Therefore, one limitation of these data is that they do not consider the wellbeing of younger women. Among the women who responded, 47% (n=21) were living with children, 13% (n=6) identified as 2SLGBTQIA+, and 7% (n=3) identified as having a disability.

Roughly three-quarters (76%; n=34) of the respondents had attained at least some postsecondary education, which is higher than the national census reported for women over 25 in HV-GB (69%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (62%) in 2016.<sup>3</sup> The next largest group was those with a high school diploma (13%; n=6). The fact that most respondents had completed at least some postsecondary education at the time of the survey is another limitation of these data. In other words, the data may not be inclusive of the experiences of individuals with varied educational attainment backgrounds.



**47%**  
(n=21)  
had children  
living with them

**13%**  
(n=6)  
identified as  
2SLGBTQIA+

**7%**  
(n=3)  
had a  
disability

### Age of Respondents

24% (n=11) 26-34  
40% (n=18) 35-54  
16% (n=7) 55-64  
20% (n=9) 65 or over

**89%**  
(n=40)  
had lived in HV-  
GB for 5+ years

## Physical Wellbeing

*“Physical wellbeing is about strength, health, endurance, and feeling well. It is not about physical beauty or ability. Being physically well means being able to have a healthy lifestyle, including being able to have a healthy diet and body. Physical wellbeing also includes having access to a safe, affordable, appropriate place to live.”*

This section outlines findings related to women’s physical wellbeing, in terms of their recreational activity, access to good food and clean water, physical safety, knowledge and access to services, and housing situations.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. (2016). Census profile, 2016 census: Happy Valley-Goose Bay [Census Subdivision], Newfoundland and Labrador [Province]. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=1010025&Geo2=PR&Code2=10&SearchText=Happy%20Valley-Goose%20Bay&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0>

## Recreation & Physical Activity

The main physical activities people enjoyed doing a least once a week were outdoor activities, such as **walking** (n=21), **fishing** (n=11) and **berry picking** (n=8), though a wide range of options were selected, including going to the gym, hunting, and jogging.

## Access to Good Food & Clean Water

At least once or twice in the past year...

**64%**  
(n=29)

were able to get  
country food

**40%**  
(n=18)

could not access good,  
nutritious food

**23%**  
(n=10)

ran out of food and  
could not afford more

**33%**  
(n=15)

had difficulty accessing  
safe, clean drinking water

15 women (33%) expanded on why they could not access country food. Four cited the ban on hunting caribou as the reason for being unable to access country food, which was also noted as a barrier to cultural practice. Other barriers included not having transportation, not knowing their rights to access country food, not having a firearm, and not have someone to help them get it.

Respondents who were under 55 years old were less likely to report having access to good food and clean water than women 55 and over. Those over 65 did not report instances of running out of food and being unable to afford more. It may be worth investigating the protective factors for older women, and/or why younger women face more barriers to accessing food.

## Physical Safety

At least once or twice in the past year...

**18%**  
(n=8)

experienced  
some form of  
violence

**22%**  
(n=10)

felt unsafe  
in their  
own home

**35%**  
(n=16)

felt unsafe  
in a  
public space

Overall, 18% (roughly 1 in 5) of the respondents reported experiencing violence at some point in the past year. Younger women reported higher rates of violence. About 20% of women under the age of 55 reported experiencing violence in the past year. Similarly, women under 55 more often reported feeling unsafe in their own home (27%). Women between the ages of 36-55 also had the most reported incidence of feeling unsafe in public spaces at 56% (n=10).

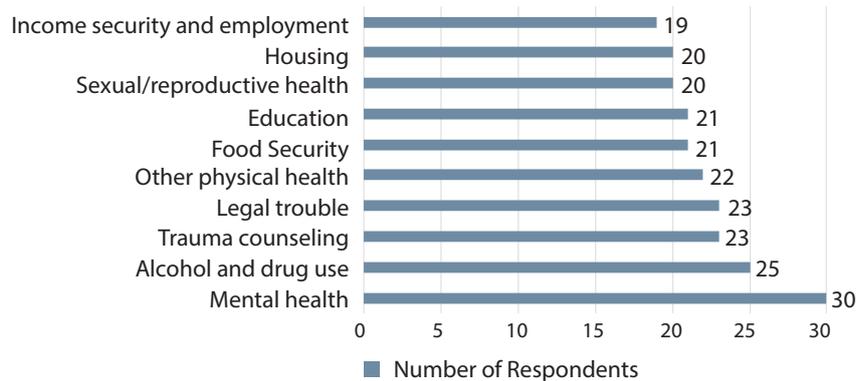
## Knowledge About and Actual Access to Services

Women who responded to the survey were most aware of how to access mental health (67%; n=30), and alcohol and drug use services (56%; n=25). Women were least likely to know how to access housing (44%; n=20), sexual and reproductive health (44%; n=20), and income security and employment services (42%; n=19). Knowledge of services differed by age group. Women 36-54 years old had the highest knowledge overall, with at least 50% of respondents knowing how to access each service.

In the past year, however, some women needed but could not access general health services (44%; n=20), mental health services (29%; n=13), and/or sexual or reproductive health services

(9%; n=4). In other words, even though most women knew how to access many of these services, they could not always do so. This was the case for women under 65 and especially women between the ages of 26-34, who reported the highest rate of being unable to access services they needed. A limitation of these data is that while someone may report not having issues accessing these services, we cannot tell from the data whether they needed and were able to access the service, or they simply did not require the service. This is an area for further inquiry.

### Knowledge about How to Access Services



## Housing Situation

*“I’ve had to invest in a high-cost mortgage which would not have been so high if Muskrat Falls had not started in the area. When I moved here, there was a huge demand for housing due to construction workers moving to the area for work on the dam” (Survey Respondent).*

**38%**  
(n=17)

felt that their  
choice of where to  
live was too limited

**64%**  
(n=29)

were not  
experiencing serious  
housing issues

Respondents were able to select multiple reasons they might be experiencing issues with housing. Of those who had issues with their housing, 24% (n=11) were experiencing problems with housing affordability, and 16% (n=7) said their places needed major repairs. Fewer than three people said their housing was too small or didn’t have enough space for the number of people living there. When asked to select things that were preventing them from resolving issues with their housing, 50% (n=10) cited lack of money, 10% (n= < 3) cited unemployment, and 25% (n=5) noted the shortage of housing options.

Increased cost of living and housing costs were widely cited as impacts of the Muskrat Falls hydro-electric dam project, with increased demand for housing from highly paid workers driving up the costs for other residents.

## Mental and Intellectual Wellbeing

*“Mental and intellectual wellbeing come from the knowledge and wisdom gained through family, education, Elders and life experience. Mental and intellectual wellbeing mean being able to value the thoughts of people we trust and trusting ourselves when we disagree with the people close to us. Mental wellbeing comes from being wise and capable of making life’s decisions or having someone we trust, and we choose, who can help us make life’s decisions. It also includes how we react to other people, and how we accept, and are accepted by, others”.*

This section gives an overview of findings related to women’s mental and intellectual wellbeing, including their worries related to basic needs, their civic and political engagement, and learning opportunities available to them.

### Worrying About Basic Needs



Only those between the ages of 26-54 expressed worry about meeting the basic needs of themselves and/or their families. When looking at this age range alone, a full two-thirds (66%, n=19) worried about meeting their basic needs at least once or twice in the past year.

### Civic and Political Engagement



Of those who felt uncomfortable expressing their opinions or viewpoints in public settings, lack of confidence was the main reason given (68%; n=23), followed by lack of opportunity (26%; n=9), and experiencing discrimination (less than n=3).

**Two-thirds (67%; n=30) of respondents said they were involved in politics** in some way, while one-third (33%; n=15) said they had not been involved in politics at all in the past year. The most common ways people were involved in politics included **voting in elections** (60%; n=27), **filling out surveys** (24%; n= 11), and **attending community meetings** (22%; n=10).

Most respondents had voted in recent federal and provincial elections (80% [n=35] and 78% [n=35]<sup>4</sup> respectively). There was also high participation in Nunatsiavut Government elections, with 70% (n=31) voting in the presidential election and 81% (n=35) voting in the membership election. There was lower voter participation in municipal elections (52%; n=23), the NunaKatiget Inuit Community Corporation-HVGB election (26%; n=9), and the Sivunivut Inuit Community Corporation-North West River Election (9%; n=3).

*most voted in federal and provincial elections ... there was also high participation in Nunatsiavut Government elections*

Across all elections, voter participation was the lowest for those under 35 years old. Interestingly, the highest voter participation among 26-34 year olds was in the Nunatsiavut membership election with 55% saying they voted. The NunaKatiget Inuit Community elections, and Sivunivut Inuit Community elections had the lowest participation overall, especially among those under 55 years old. These results may point to a need to increase opportunities for, and benefits of, civic engagement among younger voters.

<sup>4</sup>The difference between these numbers reflects a different response rate for each of the questions.

Respondents could select multiple reasons why they did or did not vote. The most common reasons for voting in elections were believing it was their **civic duty** (74%; n=29), followed by **wanting to change things in general** (36%; n=14), seeing it as an **opportunity for self-expression** (33%; n=13), and being **inspired by a specific candidate** (26%; n=10).

Of those who did not vote in any elections, but were eligible, 48% (n=10) **didn't know who to vote for**, and 29% (n=6) **didn't feel they could support any of the candidates**. Fewer than three people noted that the voting station was inaccessible or that they were ill at the time of an election and so could not vote. Four people said they **didn't have time to vote**. Four people were **not aware of the election**, and another four people **didn't think it would make a difference** to vote.

## Learning Opportunities

**53% (n=24) of respondents wanted to pursue informal learning opportunities** in the previous year, but 42% (n=10) of those women did not pursue those opportunities. Participants were able to select multiple reasons for why they were unable to pursue learning opportunities. Of those who wanted to pursue informal learning opportunities, but did not, 50% (n=5) said it was because they could not afford to, and another 50% (n=5) said they **didn't know about the opportunities available**. An additional 40% (n=4) **didn't have help with their caregiving roles**.

**49% (n=21) of women said they wanted to pursue formal education or training opportunities**, but 57% (n=12) of those women did not pursue them. Like with informal opportunities, 50% (n=6) of those who wanted to pursue formal education but didn't in the last year **couldn't afford to**. 25% (n=3) said that **not having help with caregiving roles and/or lack of transportation were barriers**.

## Emotional Wellbeing

*"Emotional wellbeing is about inner strength. It includes valuing yourself, being able to have control over your overall wellbeing, and having a healthy image of yourself. To be emotionally well, you have to have access to social support".*

This section gives an overview of findings related to women's emotional wellbeing. Respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed with a series of statements associated with emotional wellbeing.

### Feelings Related to Emotional Wellbeing

Generally, women reported high emotional wellbeing. Respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that they...

- ... feel loved (100%; n=44)*
- ... feel their life is meaningful (95%; n=41)*
- ... are leading a purposeful life (90%; n=40)*
- ... have good self-esteem and value themselves (75%; n=33)*
- ... feel in control of and can make choices about factors that affect their lives (86%; n=37)*
- ... can cope with difficult experiences (82%; n=37)*

## Emotional Wellbeing and Support from Others

Women respondents also tended to feel well supported. Many women somewhat or strongly agreed that they...

- ... can trust people around them (91%; n=41)*
- ... receive support from others to help manage their problems (91%; n=39)*
- ... have opportunities to meaningfully contribute to their community (88%; n=38)*
- ... can ask for help from people around them (79%; n=35)*
- ... are in regular contact with mentors, role models, or Elders (63%; n=27)*

In the future, it could be useful to better understand barriers to women's access to mentors, role models, or Elders, since respondents were least likely to agree with this statement.

## Spiritual Wellbeing

*"Spiritual wellbeing lies within us and comes from our connections to the land and to the people. It includes being aware of our spirituality, self-acceptance and respect for others, and being able to practice and experience the virtues of love (having compassion for others), joy (having a song in your heart), long suffering (being patient and perseverant), kindness (being thoughtful to others without seeking reward), faithfulness (a commitment to being true & loyal), gentleness (consideration for the feelings of others), self-control, and energy (your hand to the world, or your aura)".*

This section highlights findings about women's spiritual wellbeing in relation to their spiritual practices and connections with the land.

### Spiritual Practices

Of those with a spiritual practice, most feel comfortable being open about their beliefs (83%; n=25), find their spirituality helpful for accepting things beyond their control (93%; n=27), agree that their spiritual and cultural traditions fit together (93%; n=27), and report that their spiritual practices keep them connected to people important to them (93%; n=27).

**68%**  
**(n=30)**

have a spiritual practice

Most also have a place to go to connect to their spirituality (86%; n=26) and can get resources and learn practices to help them connect to their spirituality (79%; n=23). However, 29% (n=8) experienced barriers to practicing their spirituality, such as: partner not being spiritual; others not accepting their spiritual practice; not knowing where to get info on Inuit ancestry; and time constraints.

### Connection with the Land

Most respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that...

- ... they have opportunities to get out on the land and enjoy nature when and as often as they want (68%; n=31).*

- ... they take specific actions to protect the natural environment in and around their community, e.g., reducing water consumption, signing petitions about environmental protection, reducing garbage (82%; n=37).*
- ... they are satisfied with the quality of the natural environment around their community (69%; n=31).*
- ... Happy Valley-Goose Bay is developing in a way that will allow us to live well into the future, regardless of the demands being placed on the environment right now (51%; n=23).*
- ... they can reach their full potential in Happy Valley-Goose Bay (73%; n=33).*

## Cultural Wellbeing

*“Cultural wellbeing is about having the freedom to practice your own culture, and to belong to a cultural group. Cultural wellbeing helps us be who we are as individuals. Cultural wellbeing comes from being valued for the differences that define us and our beliefs, our history, and our roots. Cultural wellbeing adds to the greater good.”*

This section highlights findings about women’s cultural wellbeing, such as their ability to practice cultural traditions and their sense of belonging.

### Cultural Practices and Connection

**93%**  
(n=41)

somewhat or  
strongly feel  
that they belong

Of women who reported practicing cultural traditions (n=34), most felt their traditions were accepted within (91%; n=29) and outside (85%; n=28) their communities. Respondents who practiced cultural traditions felt their traditions connected them to their past (94%; n=31) and to people important to them (82%; n=26). 87% (n=27) find their cultural traditions help them accept things outside of their control in life.

**76%**  
(n=34)

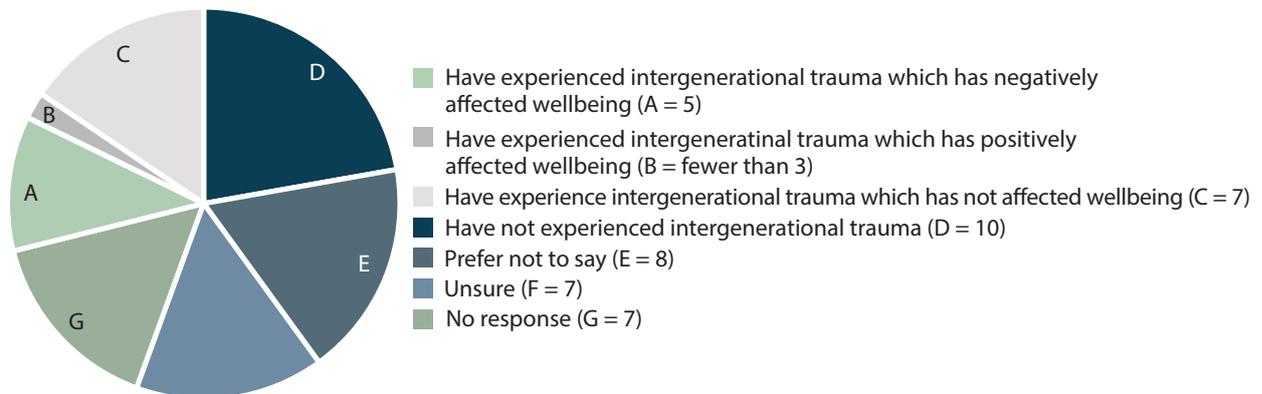
practice  
cultural  
traditions

Some women faced barriers to practicing their cultural traditions, including 28% (n=9) who didn’t have a place to go and 31% (n=9) who couldn’t get resources or learn practices to connect with their culture. 38% (n=11) noted facing other barriers, such as: distance; time constraints; laws on hunting/ fishing (especially caribou and salmon); lack of programming; lack of access to mentors/Elders and feelings of disconnect from the Inuit community; lack of availability of traditional foods; lack of information; and mental health status.

## Other Aspects of Wellbeing

The final section of this report highlights two other important aspects of wellbeing that cut across other areas of wellbeing, including: (1) experiences of intergenerational trauma; and (2) experiences of discrimination.

### Experience of Intergenerational Trauma and Impact on Wellbeing



### Intergenerational Trauma and Wellbeing

Of the 38 women who responded to this question, **13 (34%) said they had experienced intergenerational trauma**, while 10 (26%) said they had not. Five women who noted experiencing intergenerational trauma (38%) said it impacted their wellbeing negatively, while 7 women (54%) said it did not affect their wellbeing. One third (33%; n=15) either did not respond, or said they preferred not to answer, potentially due to the sensitive nature of the question.

### Experiences of Discrimination in the Community

Respondents were asked to choose all the ways that they had experienced discrimination in their community in the previous month. At the time, **most women (69%; n=29) reported that they had not experienced discrimination. Of those who had experienced discrimination, 'ethnicity or culture' was the most cited reason (12%; n=5)** while others cited gender, sexual orientation, family type, language or accent, age, body size, and source of income as the reasons they experienced discrimination.

### Closing Thoughts

The wellbeing of women-identifying Nunastivut Beneficiaries is dynamic and impacted by many factors. The survey data show how age, caregiving responsibilities, employment opportunities, political participation and many other factors interact with and contribute to women's wellbeing. The results highlight that many women experience positive emotional wellbeing and feel a strong sense of belonging in their communities. However, women also experience several barriers to their wellbeing; they may experience violence, have trouble meeting their basic needs, or have inadequate time and resources to pursue educational opportunities. This report provides a starting point for considering how to further advance the wellbeing of diverse Nunatsivut Inuit women in and around HV-GB. This report is available at: [www.criaw-icref.ca/publications/the-wellbeing-of-women-identifying-nunatsivut-beneficiaries-in-and-around-happy-valley-goose-bay](http://www.criaw-icref.ca/publications/the-wellbeing-of-women-identifying-nunatsivut-beneficiaries-in-and-around-happy-valley-goose-bay).

To learn more about women's wellbeing in HV-GB, follow the same link to access other reports in this series. Find out more about the project at:

[www.criaw-icref.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/CVI-Overview-Dec.-2021.pdf](http://www.criaw-icref.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/CVI-Overview-Dec.-2021.pdf).