

Results at a glance

Evaluation of the Reconciliation Secretariat

The Reconciliation Secretariat (the Secretariat) is Justice Canada's Centre of Expertise (CoE) on Indigenous relations, reconciliation and partnership building and leads the coordination of key departmental legal policy initiatives aimed at advancing reconciliation. The Secretariat is comprised of two teams: the Policy Development and Strategic Advice Team, and the Engagement and Partnership Team. In addition, the Senior Director supports and briefs the Minister of Justice and senior officials on the progress of the priorities related to the reconciliation agenda, provides direction and advice, and represents Justice Canada in inter-departmental and intergovernmental meetings, and in meetings with external partners and stakeholders. The Secretariat also leads the development of the Indigenous Justice Strategy (IJS), which aims to address systemic discrimination and the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the justice system.

WHAT WAS FOUND

- The Secretariat fulfills a valued role in supporting government and departmental priorities to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Its continued relevance is demonstrated by the expanded mandate of the Secretariat over the evaluation period.
- Since its introduction, the demand for and nature of the services provided by the Secretariat has changed and increased over time, growing in terms of the number and complexity of Indigenous-related files it undertakes. The Secretariat has been able to effectively respond to these changing demands and roles, although it lacks the capacity to fully take on its role as a CoE. The resource challenge has led to over-burdened staff and managers.
- As a CoE, the Secretariat has played a role in building the Department's capacity in engaging with Indigenous partners, through formal training, the development of tools and resources, and the provision of advice and guidance. However, there is a lack of capacity to be fully responsive to requests, resulting in a more reactive *ad hoc* delivery of this role. In addition, awareness within Justice Canada of this role is low.
- Most instances where there could be potential for overlap in work between the Secretariat and other parts of Justice Canada were managed through coordination and communication. There is still a lack of clarity with respect to the linkage between the IJS and the Pan-Canadian Strategy to Address the Overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in the Criminal Justice System. The perception of overlap is exacerbated by the lack of clarity about the Secretariat's role.

- The Secretariat has contributed to many Indigenous-specific files and priorities. Of particular mention is the Secretariat's leadership of Justice Canada's contribution to the Federal Pathway response to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice.
- The Secretariat is working effectively with other government departments (OGDs) and Indigenous partners. OGDs see the Secretariat bringing value to committees/working groups and their work overall. Indigenous partners recognize that the Secretariat is making sincere efforts in their interactions and relationships with them.
- The IJS file has advanced well under the leadership of the Secretariat, which has conducted a comprehensive engagement to inform the development of the IJS with Indigenous partners, provinces and territories, developed an online learning and activity space, and undertaken various IJS-related governance activities and meetings. The engagement phase of the IJS is expected to be completed by March 2024.
- The Secretariat has made an effort to ensure that its team and the work it undertakes reflect the principles of diversity and inclusion. The Secretariat's team is very diverse, including 75% Indigenous representation, as well as regional and gender diversity. The diverse team brings value to the work of the Secretariat.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: The Indigenous Rights and Relations Portfolio, in collaboration with sectors across the Department, should undertake a whole-of-Justice review to clarify mandates, roles and responsibilities in regard to Indigenous-related priorities.

Recommendation 2: The Reconciliation Secretariat should seek opportunities to secure ongoing resources to ensure that it has the ability and capacity to sustain and advance government and departmental priorities regarding reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION: The Evaluation of the Reconciliation Secretariat was conducted by the Department of Justice Evaluation Branch and covered fiscal years 2018-19 to 2021-22. The evaluation examined relevance in terms of the alignment of the Secretariat with government and departmental priorities, design and delivery and performance, in accordance with the Treasury Board's *Policy on Results* (2016).

