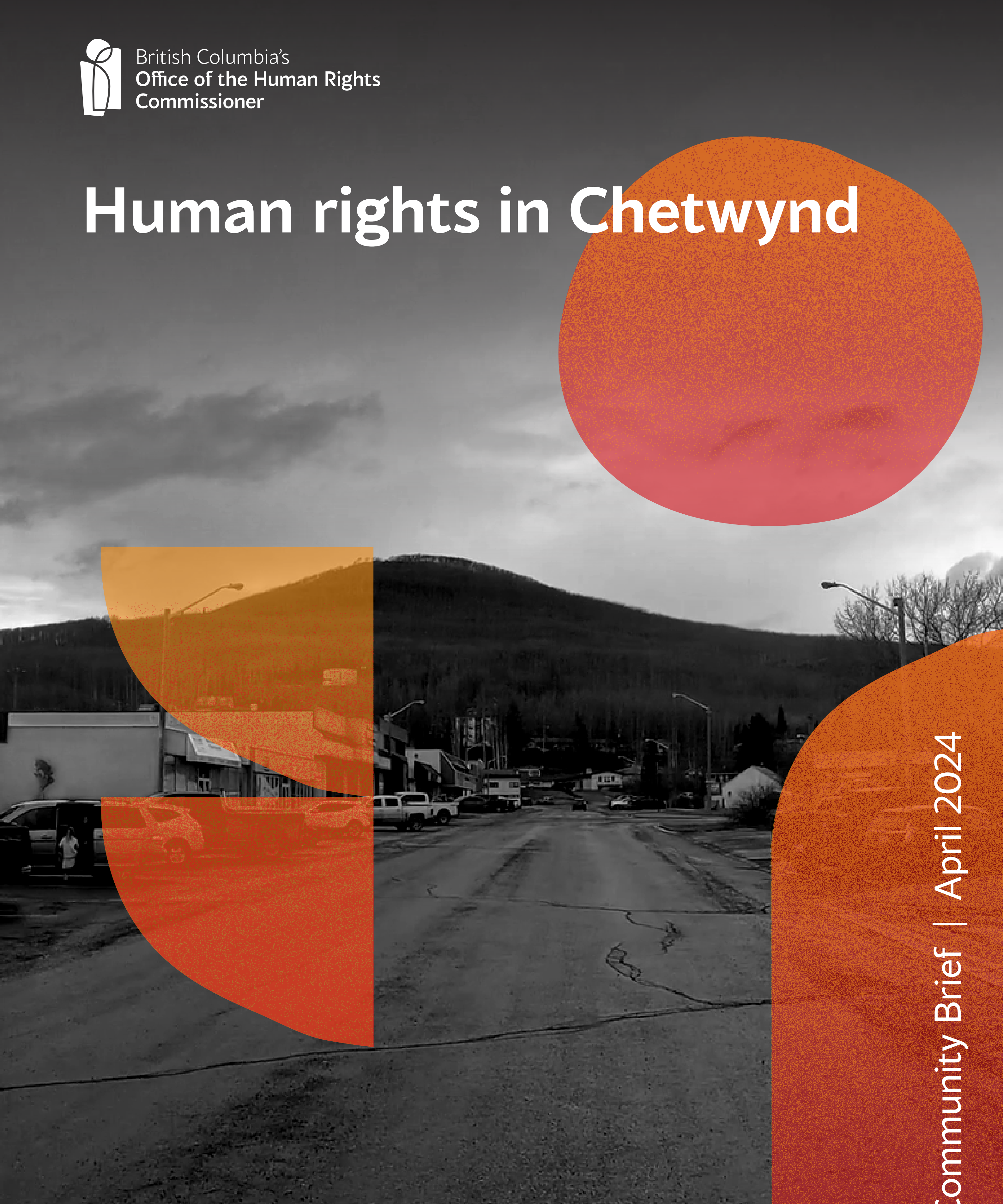
British Columbia's
Office of the Human Rights
Commissioner

Human rights in Chetwynd



Community Brief | April 2024

Human rights in Chetwynd

APRIL 2024

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This publication can be found in electronic format on the website of British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner: **baseline.bchumanrights.ca/chetwynd**

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This Community Brief is based on research conducted on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of Saulteau and West Moberly peoples. We are grateful for their historic and current stewardship of these lands.

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If you are unsure about terminology used in this report, we invite you to visit our Human Rights Glossary at: bchumanrights.ca/glossary

Thank you

This work would not have been possible without the contributions of our Chetwynd Community Connector, the Tansi Friendship Centre Society. In addition, we would like to offer our gratitude to the Chetwynd Public Library for generously supporting and connecting us with many individuals who access their programs and services. We are thankful to the participants, many of whom have lived experience and/or directly serve the community, who contributed their time, energy and experiences with us.

Who we are

B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner is an independent officer of the Legislature. Under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*, the Commissioner is responsible for promoting and protecting human rights in the province.

BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (BCOHRC) envisions a province free from inequality, discrimination and injustice, where we uphold human rights for all and fulfil our responsibilities to one another. We strive to address the root causes of these issues by shifting laws, policies, practices and cultures. We do this work through education, research, advocacy, inquiry and monitoring.

Why we created this Community Brief

Soon after BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner was established in 2019, we began work on the Baseline Project, a multi-year project to map out the state of human rights in B.C. As part of the Baseline Project, we want to better understand human rights issues in different regions and in both urban and rural communities. To do this, we conducted in-depth research in several communities, including Chetwynd.

Each individual Community Brief tells the human rights story of a single community. Our Community Brief series offers a sample of the critical human rights issues affecting people in different parts of the province and explores how they manifest in unique ways in each community. The Community Briefs also celebrate community strengths and actions already being taken to address inequality, discrimination and injustice in communities throughout B.C.

How we created this Community Brief

Between November 2022 and June 2023, BCOHRC and local community organizations acting as "Community Connectors" held four focus groups and 17 interviews with 39 individuals, including service provider staff, those who access Community Connector programs or services and other people with lived experience of human rights issues.

This Community Brief reflects what we learned from all those who contributed to this project, supplemented with data from Statistics Canada, media sources and other relevant secondary sources. All quotations are from people who participated in the focus groups and interviews.

By necessity, this Community Brief is not comprehensive. We know there are human rights issues in Chetwynd that we were unable to learn about or include here and much more could be said about each issue that is included. This Brief is offered as a snapshot intended to reflect several significant human rights issues in the community and to inspire action to address those issues.

Community background

A short history of Chetwynd

Chetwynd is located in the foothills of the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains[1]. It is British Columbia's entrance to the Peace River region and sits on the traditional territories of the Saulteau, West Moberly and Halfway River First Nations who are part of the Treaty 8 Nations.[2,3,4] The West Moberly First Nation used to be part of the Hudson Hope Band, but the Band split in 1977 becoming Halfway River First Nation and West Moberly First Nation.[5]

First Nations in the area signed Treaty No. 8 on Jun. 21, 1899. It is the largest treaty by geographical area in Canada covering 840,000 km across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Northwest Territories.[6] Treaty 8 is one of the most comprehensive of the numbered treaties and the only numbered treaty signed in B.C. Treaty 8 recognizes certain rights such as rights to land and resources both renewable and non-renewable. It recognizes the co-management of these land and resources including the protection of the habitat, land and cultural values and restrictions of future oil and gas development.[7,8] A total of 39 First Nations have signed or adhered to Treaty 8 including eight in B.C. The Treaty 8 Nations in B.C. are Doig River, Fort Nelson, Halfway River, McLeod Lake, Prophet River, Saulteau, West Moberly and Blueberry River First Nations.[9]

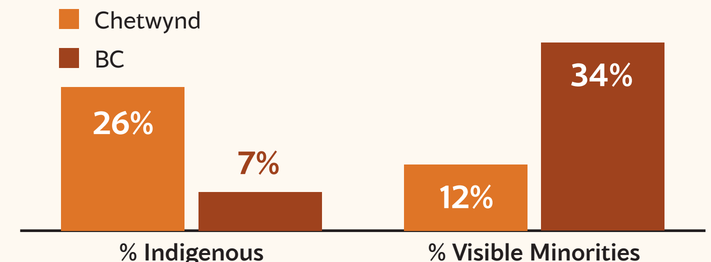
Nature and the abundance of natural resources have long drawn people to this region which has shaped land use greatly. During the 19th century, many miners passed through the Chetwynd area to take part in the gold rush.[10] In the early 20th century, more Indigenous and white people relocated to Chetwynd.[11] The local economic development of the region relied heavily on natural resources for numerous industries such as ranching, farming, forestry and energy.[12]

Beginning in the 1870s, children of the Saulteau and West Moberly First Nations were removed from their communities and forced to attend residential schools across the country, including in Williams Lake, Kamloops, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. During the 1970s, at least twelve Métis families were forcibly displaced from Moccasin Flats in Fort McMurray, A.B. to make way for oil sands development.[13] Some of these Métis people were moved to Wabi Crescent in Chetwynd.[14] The legacies of colonialism, including residential schools and treaty rights, continue to profoundly shape the human rights dynamics in the Chetwynd region.

Snapshot of Chetwynd today

The City of Chetwynd has a population of

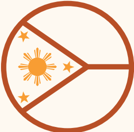
2,302 people.[15]



As of 2021, **26 per cent** of Chetwynd residents were **Indigenous** and **12 per cent** were **visible minorities**.[17]

From 2016 to 2021, the Indigenous and visible minority populations increased by **69 per cent**.[16]

The nearby Saulteau and West Moberly First Nations' reserves have **396 residents**.[18]

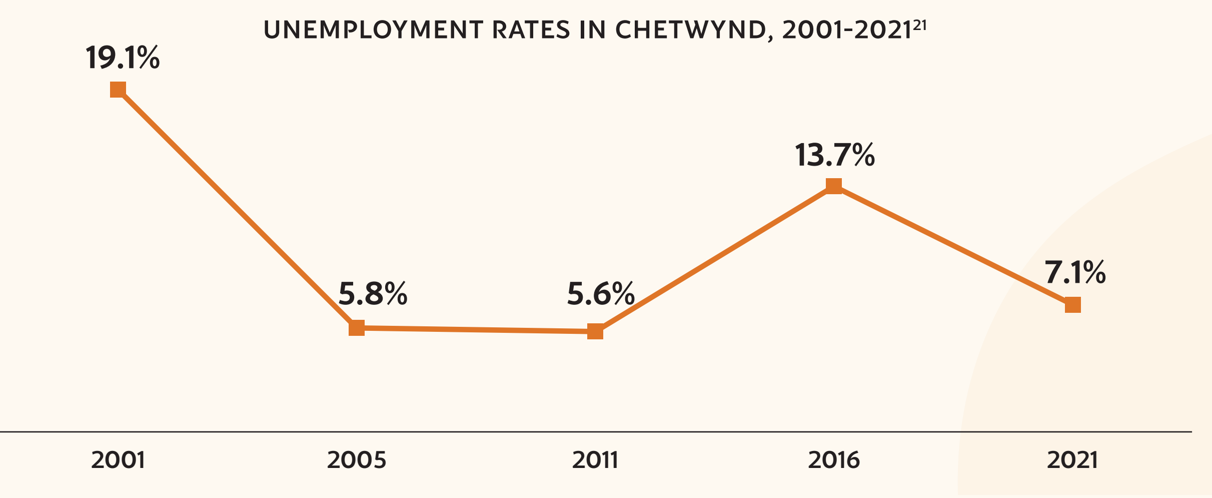


Filipino people represent the largest ethnic minority group in Chetwynd (5 per cent of the total population in 2021).[19]

As a "boom and bust" town, the unemployment rate in Chetwynd has fluctuated significantly over the last 20 years

In 2021, the unemployment rate was 7.1 per cent, but has likely increased since the Canfor sawmill closed in April 2023.[20]

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES IN CHETWYND, 2001-2021[21]



Colonization, discrimination and hate

Through our conversations in Chetwynd, we heard that racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples, newcomers, women and LGBTQ2SAI+ people are human rights challenges in the community. By preventing people from accessing basic services to which they are entitled, discrimination creates systemic disparities and inequities.

Colonization and anti-Indigenous racism

The impact of colonialism is ongoing, including intergenerational trauma from experiences with residential schools and the erosion of Indigenous rights. We heard from some Indigenous people about their mistrust of public institutions in the wake of residential schools and other colonial policies. Indigenous participants also expressed apprehension about practicing their cultural traditions due to stigma and safety concerns.

> ***"I went through lots, like I grew up in a residential home. I grew up in day schooling. I got put down because I was Native. I got put down because I was a woman. I got put down because I wasn't the right colour."***

Policing and access to justice

Participants shared how mistrust of police stems from the role the RCMP have historically played in controlling Indigenous peoples. For example, RCMP acted as truant officers for the residential school system by searching for and returning students who ran away from school or were otherwise absent. The RCMP also fined and arrested Indigenous parents who resisted sending their children to residential schools.[22]

Participants described interactions with police that reflect both over- and under-policing and inadequate access to justice. Some participants explained that, when their collective or individual rights are violated, police do not respond to their claims with the same attention or rigor as they do with non-Indigenous residents.[23] In addition, Indigenous participants discussed inadequate access to justice when Victims Services were not provided to individuals when impacted by gender-based violence.

> ***"All of it was proved ... even with the beatings, you're standing there black and blue and the RCMP [say], 'Well, he's not here at the moment. There's nothing we can do. I'm not going to go look for him.'"***

Regarding over-policing, we heard of an instance where the RCMP responded to a mental health wellness check for an Indigenous man but neglected to assess his mental health. Instead, they confiscated his drugs. Paramedics did not attend. Another Indigenous participant shared a story about their son being arrested while a white peer was let go:

> ***"He went to the college for a little while, but then he met some friends. They had some firecrackers … and put [them] in his backpack. They took the powder out, put it in a bottle or something. Next thing you know my son is being handcuffed out in the parking lot because they thought he was building a bomb. But the other kid, the white boy … nothing happened to him."***

Education

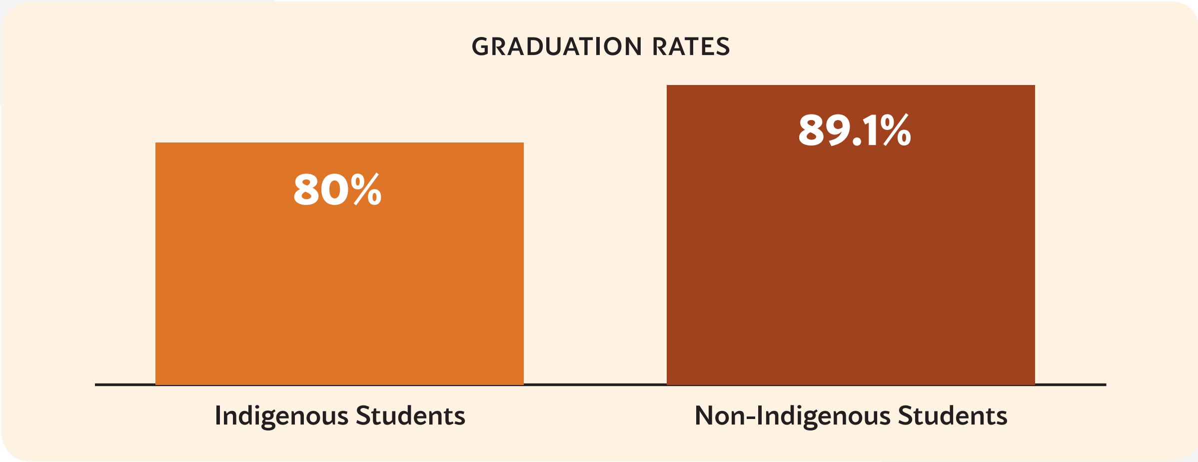
Since the late 1960s, there have been public reports condemning how schools in Canada treated Indigenous students and calling for systemic change.[24] We heard from multiple Indigenous participants that the first time they experienced racism was at school. One participant shared their experience from kindergarten approximately twenty years ago:

> ***"I walked in on kindergarten … Natives were on one side and everyone else on the other. Every parent walked to the principal and went ballistic. Because it wasn't by our last name … it was just like they assumed that that's the way life was going to be. That we were only going to be friends with the group of people that were the same colour as our skin. That's where it started, literally kindergarten."***

We were told schools use attendance to assess whether education is improving for Indigenous students.[25] However, this reporting makes some Indigenous students and families feel like they are being monitored by education staff.

> ***"I [did] not necessarily want to register them as Aboriginal kids because there's two different forms. And on this form it said something about how they were going to monitor absences and how they were going to report it and I'm thinking, 'this should be for every student in the class.' … Why would you just [do] this for Aboriginal kids? [You think] these parents are less able to determine why their kids are staying home from school? Why they're sick or what. I found it almost offensive."***

We heard from some participants that they feel as though educators have lower expectations for Indigenous students. We heard this contributes to the disparity in graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Since 1996, the average graduation rate has been lower for Indigenous students (80.0 per cent) than non-Indigenous students (89.1 per cent) even though the gap has decreased over the years.[26] Participants describe how educators emphasize simply passing classes rather than excelling in them, which has the potential to influence the confidence of some Indigenous students and impact their contributions in the class. We heard that discriminatory treatment from some educators and other students could also have a lasting impact on some Indigenous students' relationship with their Indigenous identity.



"I can't read or focus as well as other students. They seem to get better marks and they raise their hand, and I'm scared to ... so you begin to realize at an early age there's a difference, eh? You start to feel that, right from Grade 4 and up into high school, college or university, whatever it may be ... and you begin to wonder and think, 'why was I born as an Indian?'"

Caribou Partnership Agreement: Community consultation and community responses

Some participants shared their perspective that the Government of B.C. has repeatedly failed to honour the rights of Treaty 8 signatories including allowing industrial development without seeking approval from Treaty 8 First Nations.[27] In the past few years, there have been several bilateral and trilateral government-to-government agreements with some Treaty 8 First Nations. These agreements are intended to redress historical wrongs and commit both the federal and provincial governments to work collaboratively with the First Nations who signed them.[28]

In 2020, the Government of B.C. signed the Caribou Partnership Agreement with the federal government, the Saulteau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations to increase the population of six Southern Mountain Caribou herds and prevent extinction in the local region.[29]

We heard from non-Indigenous participants that there was dissatisfaction with the overall community consultation process with the Caribou Partnership Agreement. Community members felt that there was insufficient communication with the municipality and Chetwynd residents about the Partnership Agreement and its impacts such as access to the land for recreational use and new resource development. We heard from a non-Indigenous participant:

> ***"We're getting initiatives in our area that [had] no consultation with stakeholders.... Things like allowable timber harvest, the Caribou Recovery Plan.... When the provincial government comes in ... they negotiate and talk to the First Nations peoples, as they should, but they exclude local government and the other residents. It immediately creates a division, and it feels like a step backwards."***

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants felt the consultation process led by the Government of B.C. heightened existing racial tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.[30] We heard that townspeople were frustrated at all levels of government, but their frustrations were largely directed towards the Saulteau and West Moberly First Nations because of their proximity to Chetwynd.

> ***"There were threats made to Indigenous people who ... weren't aware that that agreement was even there ... [the B.C.] government is saying, 'oh yeah, the bands have signed off and all the people on the territories just signed off,' and those people didn't even know. And so, they're defending the integrity of their own cultures and values, but [the B.C.] government threw everybody under the bus."***

The frustrations culminated in verbal attacks, both in-person and online, toward Indigenous people. This included racist statements at town hall meetings, community ice hockey games and on social media.

> ***"There were issues in the locker rooms for little kids on hockey teams that were being told that they were Indians, and they should go back to the reserve.... There were parents in those bleachers that were having similar conversations."***

Some participants felt that poorly conceived and executed community consultations could derail Chetwynd's path toward reconciliation.

> ***"I'm hearing comments lately that I haven't heard for 20 years in the region, and it really worries me."***

Under the Caribou Partnership Agreement, the Government of B.C. committed to directing the Resilience BC Anti-Racism Network to "review and report on any hate speech or other forms of racism that may have arisen" around the Agreement's public engagement and provide Indigenous anti-racism training.[31] The B.C. government received and is reviewing the report they commissioned. The training has yet to occur.

“I have been asking … every minister for Indigenous relations … when do we get to see this training? [It] has been three years and the pot is still on the stove. It might not be boiling over now, but it just sits there and simmers.”

Despite these challenges, we heard that the Chetwynd community has expressed their commitment to reconciliation. The current mayor is Indigenous and was re-elected in 2022 with 63 per cent of the vote.[32] The mayor has proclaimed June 21st to be National Indigenous Peoples Day in response to the discovery of the children buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.[33] On the first Canada Day following the discovery in Kamloops, the District of Chetwynd and the Chiefs of Saulteaux and West Moberly First Nations collectively decided to hang orange flags, signifying Every Child Matters. The Mayor and Council also raised the Treaty 8 Flag alongside the flags of the District of Chetwynd, B.C. and Canada on National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in 2021.[34]

Everyday discrimination

Systemic discrimination can be experienced through attitudes, behaviours and processes in public settings or institutions. Participants shared that everyday discrimination is persistent in Chetwynd through interactions in stores, restaurants and casual conversation.

“There is a divide that still exists between non-Native people and Native people, and we are treated poorly at restaurants … sometimes treated poorly in the pharmacies.”

“Being an Indigenous person in a small community, everyone just suspects we’re alcoholics and we’re drug users. That’s the stigma we’ve lived with for our whole lives. Especially in a small town … People still look at me and think, ‘that’s all you’re going to do with your life.’ I have an amazing job. I had an amazing family, and a lot of my friends grew up with amazing families with love from both and they’re doing stuff with their lives. But a lot of them now have kids and like we’re [in our late twenties] now, but still, it’s, ‘Oh she was a young mom’ and that’s all she’s ever going to amount to.”

While we heard that some people want to boycott businesses whose staff show discriminatory behaviour, this strategy is challenging in a town that is the size of Chetwynd because businesses have a limited number of competitors that provide the same services.

We also heard that members of the LGBTQ2SAI+ community and their families face discrimination and microaggressions in their everyday lives too. There have been positive steps towards celebrating Pride by the District of Chetwynd, which enacted its first rainbow sidewalk last year and declared June 2023 to be Pride Month.[35] However, we heard that the 2023 rainbow sidewalk was defaced and the District of Chetwynd had to repaint it. Additionally, we learned that high school students threw rocks at the 2023 Pride Walk participants.

Employment

Under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*, employers are required to maintain a work environment that is free from discrimination. Below are examples of human rights issues relating to employment that participants in Chetwynd shared.

We heard that during the COVID-19 pandemic, some people chose to leave the workforce to provide childcare or take early retirement in higher numbers than before, which left a labour gap in Chetwynd. As a result, participants noted that there has been a recent effort to recruit Filipino international students attending Northern Lights College to fill part-time positions in hospitality and customer service. We heard from participants that Filipino immigrants are often employed in low-paying customer service jobs that would otherwise go unfilled, resulting in a stereotype in Chetwynd that all Filipinos work at Tim Hortons. While we heard that Filipino employees are perceived positively by some residents, we also heard that it has been challenging for some Filipino people to obtain higher-paying positions and some people being discriminated against for not speaking English fluently.

We also heard from some participants that they were discriminated against in job competitions due to characteristics such as Indigeneity, gender and age. One participant described how a human resources representative asked a prospective employee if he was Indigenous. When the prospective employee confirmed he was Indigenous, the representative said, "Oh ok, there's nothing wrong with that." One Indigenous participant felt she was not hired because she "wasn't the right race."

Some participants also expressed frustrations that employers, such as some fast-food restaurants, display preferential hiring for students. These participants shared that students are preferred over adults because students would be less likely to need time off work to go to appointments or provide care for family members, which has a disproportionate impact on women as primary caregivers. We also heard of sexual harassment that some women faced in their jobs, such as being fired due to the shape of their bodies and unwanted solicitations from patrons.

> ***"He just looked at me, told me, 'Get out of my office. Goodbye. You're fired' ... 'cause I didn't have big tits and a big ass."***

We also heard from a participant that the stigma attached to sex work can be very challenging for those who engage in sex work and live in a small town like Chetwynd.

> **"If your name is tainted, it really impacts women that are, like, trying to freshly start because everyone knows everyone and it's hard to keep any business quiet and private. So, it doesn't take long for people to know who you are and to judge you based off of what you did yesterday or the days before, right?"**

WHAT HELPS

Below are examples from participants about programs and services in Chetwynd that help build bridges and foster community to decrease biases in the community.

Participants in the community focus groups lauded the Tansi Friendship Centre's initiative of hosting of a weekly bingo night, which allowed people from many different backgrounds to interact, build friendships and build understanding. The Tansi Friendship Centre also provides free health and social programs (for example, food bank, Elders gatherings, youth activities, family support and health and housing assistance) to meet the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people coming to, or currently living in, Chetwynd B.C. and the surrounding communities.

Some participants also mentioned The Tansi Friendship Centre's Better at Home program that is open to people 65 and older and helps foster a sense community in Chetwynd. The program provides additional support so seniors can live at home safely. Services include light housekeeping, grocery shopping, snow removal and taking seniors to medical appointments. This program also brings in nurses, dieticians and cooks to provide health and nutritional education. The Chetwynd Public Library is a safe space where people can gather and access programs and services such as digital resources and internet, assistance with provincial services and participating in adult and youth programs. The Chetwynd Library staff heard that Chetwynd is not the easiest community in which to meet new people. To address this, the library created "Welcome to Chetwynd" bags for new residents. Local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce also contributed to the welcome bags. Through this gesture, the library aims to show that "Chetwynd has a loving group of people as well."

Boom and bust economy

Boom and bust economies, where communities' experiences of economic growth and decline are linked to the performances of resource industries, are common throughout B.C.[36] While it is important to consider the economic implications of these cycles, it is also important to evaluate how these cycles shape human rights issues.[37]

> ***"We have a boom bust community. We're an industry town. So, we're really vulnerable to fluctuations in coal prices, lumber prices … it certainly affects human right issues."***

Affordable housing and food security

Under international law, everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes food, housing, clothing and the continuous improvement of living conditions.[38] Boom and bust industries often lead to fluctuations in the cost of living, which impacts people's ability to access adequate food and housing. When there is an influx of resource industry workers, rent and food prices increase. For example, the arrival of coal mine workers drove up rental prices, and the housing shortage during these times drives away other perennially in-demand workers, such as teachers and doctors.[39]

As a result of high food prices, some participants drive up to an hour and a half to Dawson Creek or Fort St. John to access more affordable groceries. However, not all individuals living in Chetwynd have access to a vehicle and are limited to purchasing groceries in town at a higher price.

> ***"When industry is really high and we've got a pipeline in town, groceries go through the roof, rent becomes unaffordable … violence goes up … more problems, more deaths."***

Gender-based violence

In 2018, 44 per cent of women in Canada reported experiencing some form of psychological, physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetimes.[40] Over four in 10 women living in remote areas who experienced intimate partner violence in 2022 said it happened daily, weekly or monthly.[41] Participants in Chetwynd discussed the violence experienced by women in the context of the boom and bust economy, including the influx of transient workers.

We heard of the increases in the frequency, severity and intensity of gender-based violence when there are more industry resource workers in Chetwynd. Participants shared that when industry resource workers come to town, they observe violence against Indigenous women and girls in particular. This aligns with findings from the "National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls" that documented the correlation between transient workers and gender-based violence.[42]

> ***"There are mostly non-Indigenous men who [come] to our area, and there's so many incidents of sexual violence against women and girls that are not … reported, that nobody knows about but us."***

Participants also noted that during a bust, when workers are laid off or unemployed, more men spend more time at home, which can similarly increase gender-based violence.

> ***"We saw the same thing with COVID, right? … the men aren't going out to work and they're trapped in the house and the women are trapped in the house … [it's] more challenging if the abuser is unemployed and home and angry."***

We also heard from multiple participants that the RCMP response to gender-based violence is often inadequate and inconsistent, which some attributed to high staff turnover in Chetwynd.

Transient labour force

The Canfor sawmill was established in 1965 and employed numerous long-term staff.[43] It closed on April 14, 2023, resulting in over 150 lost jobs.[44] During an economic bust, social problems often follow the sudden loss of jobs and income. We heard from multiple participants about the reverberation of the sawmill closure in the Chetwynd community including families moving away and increasing the transient labour force.

The loss of jobs has forced some families to leave the community. Those families include members who provide essential services such as nurses, teachers, library staff, grocery staff and volunteer firefighters. This exacerbates existing challenges faced by, for example, the education and health care sectors in Chetwynd.

> ***"If you don't have nurses, you don't have doctors. And if you don't have doctors, you don't have hospitals, so you know, you have got to be able to have a good grasp of how much one mill will cost and how much two mills will cost."***

Multiple participants expressed that the loss of Canfor jobs will exacerbate mental health and substance use concerns in the community, and thus increase pressure on service providers.

Health

Right to health care

In Chetwynd, there is a hospital, primary care medical clinic and an assistant living centre.[45] Like other communities in B.C., the health care sector is facing numerous challenges, including front-line staffing shortages, long wait times for specialists and a lack of primary care physicians, all of which increase strain on hospital emergency rooms.[46] These concerns are especially prevalent in rural communities in B.C.[47] and were identified as significant human rights priorities in Chetwynd by participants.

Recruiting and retaining health professionals in Chetwynd is a major challenge. In 2015, Chetwynd was at risk of not having any family doctors until three doctors announced they would be practicing in the newly established medical clinic.[48] We heard that the transient nature of the hospital staff, specifically doctors and nurses, contributes to staff shortages. The hospital relies on agency nurses, who travel to Chetwynd temporarily, to fill these staff shortages.

One participant shared that the health care work environment contributes to the retention challenge. They shared that some staff do not feel supported and provided examples of requested training being denied, not feeling safe in the workplace and not feeling heard by leadership. According to a health professional:

> ***"They have attracted many, many, many good nurses here.... The nurses have been forced to leave by how they were treated and what they saw and the lack of support. And word gets out ... so, we're really struggling to pull agency nurses in because of our reputation."***

Staffing shortages also result in fewer health services being offered. We heard of wait times up to eight weeks to see a family doctor. This results in patients going to the emergency room, even though the matter is not urgent, which places additional strain on the health care system.

Many participants brought up that childbirths are no longer taking place at the Chetwynd Hospital. The maternity wing closed following the completion of a risk assessment. The hospital also does not offer surgeries, occupational therapy or physiotherapy.

We heard from some participants, due to the limited health services offered in Chetwynd, people have to travel to other communities to receive health care, sometimes with devastating impacts. Patients typically travel either to Dawson Creek (104 km away) or Fort St. John (136 km away) for medical care.

> ***"An individual was having a stroke, and they waited an hour for an EHS ambulance to attend to pick them up. And because of the delay, the person lost their life."***

We heard not all people in Chetwynd can afford to travel for health care and this can add additional stressors for people. For instance, a participant noted:

> ***"Because we don't offer these services, people have to go elsewhere. And often, they can't because they don't have the money to travel. They don't have a vehicle to travel, or they don't want to do it in the winter because holy mackerel, you've been up here, right? ... Winter here is ... I mean, people die."***

Additionally, although there are programs to help Indigenous people travel to medical service facilities from their homes both on and off reserve (for example, covering the cost of travel, accommodation and meals), we heard how uptake could be improved by addressing informational and administrative barriers.

There is also a medical bus service that offers transportation for health services called Northern Health Connections. However, we heard from some participants that access to the medical bus is impeded by limited pick ups and timetables.[49]

Lastly, we heard repeatedly that the hospital is often on diversion, which means emergency patients are sent to another hospital. According to the data provided directly to the Commissioner from Northern Health on July 18, 2023, the Chetwynd Hospital was on diversion 96 times, and the average duration of the diversion was 12.63 hours in 2022. From January 1 to July 18, 2023, the hospital has been on diversion 63 times, and for an average of 13.02 hours. It is forecasted to be on diversion a total of 116 times in 2023.[50]

In 2022, the Chetwynd Hospital was on diversion 96 times, and the average duration of the diversion was 12.63 hours.

> ***"The only hospital in Chetwynd is on diversion all the time and it has gotten worse since COVID-19.... The hospital does not even post when it is on diversion status (outside the 'regular' hours of 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.) so people don't know when the hospital is closed until you get there."***

When the hospital is on diversion, people are told to call 9-1-1 to have an ambulance transport them to the closest hospital at Dawson Creek. However, we heard from residents and a service provider that the ambulances that serve Chetwynd face capacity constraints as they also serve other nearby communities. All of this leads to the community's sense of abandonment by the provincial government.

> ***"Like, we're obviously northern, we're obviously isolated and often for us, like I've been in Northeast B.C. since 1976 and often feels like us against the rest of the province ... Don't forget about the North."***

Discrimination in health care

Participants shared that some patients face discrimination in health care due to their identities and their social condition.

Indigenous-specific racism in the B.C. health care system has significant impacts on Indigenous patients and contributes to inequitable health outcomes.[51] We heard there are some medical staff in Chetwynd who are unaware of Canada's colonial history and its impacts on Indigenous peoples. There is a need for all medical staff to complete Indigenous cultural safety training and practice it in patient interactions.

We heard that Indigenous people are often stereotyped as "drug-seeking" in health care settings by medical staff including some doctors and nurses.

> ***"Patients have heard nurses talking about them from the staff room repeatedly.... I have heard over and over and over 'drug seeker' ... 'frequent flyer.'"***

Indigenous patients who are denigrated and dismissed often need family, friends or community organization staff to advocate for them to get timely access to health care. We heard of people witnessing and observing different levels of treatment and care based on ethnicity.

> ***"My wife is First Nations.... The first question out of the nurse's mouth: 'Have you used drugs? Are you high? Do you have a history of drug abuse?' ... It's not a necessary question.... I went to the hospital a couple of months later. They didn't ask me that."***

Racism in health care results in some Indigenous people delaying accessing health care. This has led to some patients not receiving medical attention until the situation is severe or critical.

The dismissal of a patient's medical issues and delayed care can have negative health implications. For example, we heard of an Indigenous patient who was at risk of falling into a coma due to low blood sugar and had stroke-like symptoms but was initially dismissed due to the "drug-seeking"" stereotype.

> ***"Your file gets pulled.... They label it as drug-seeking. Then you go in and something's really wrong and they just automatically look at this person like, they're just drug-seeking and they can't get rid of you fast enough."***

Conclusion

As in other communities in B.C., many people living in Chetwynd are experiencing significant human rights challenges, including poverty, inadequate access to housing and health care and discrimination and hate. Through conversations with community members and members of Saulteau and West Moberly First Nations, we heard many examples of critical service provision and advocacy work done by community organizations and others to help address these human rights challenges. Many people living in Chetwynd are working toward a more equitable future for their community. We hope this Community Brief contributes to those efforts.

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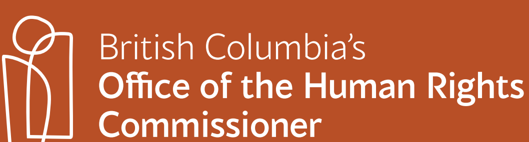

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