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01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Connect Forum brought together Cree leadership, regional institutions, and community representatives to confront urgent realities affecting health, safety, and psychosocial well-being across Eeyou Istchee. The discussions made it clear that the issues facing communities are interconnected and cannot be addressed effectively by any single entity acting alone.

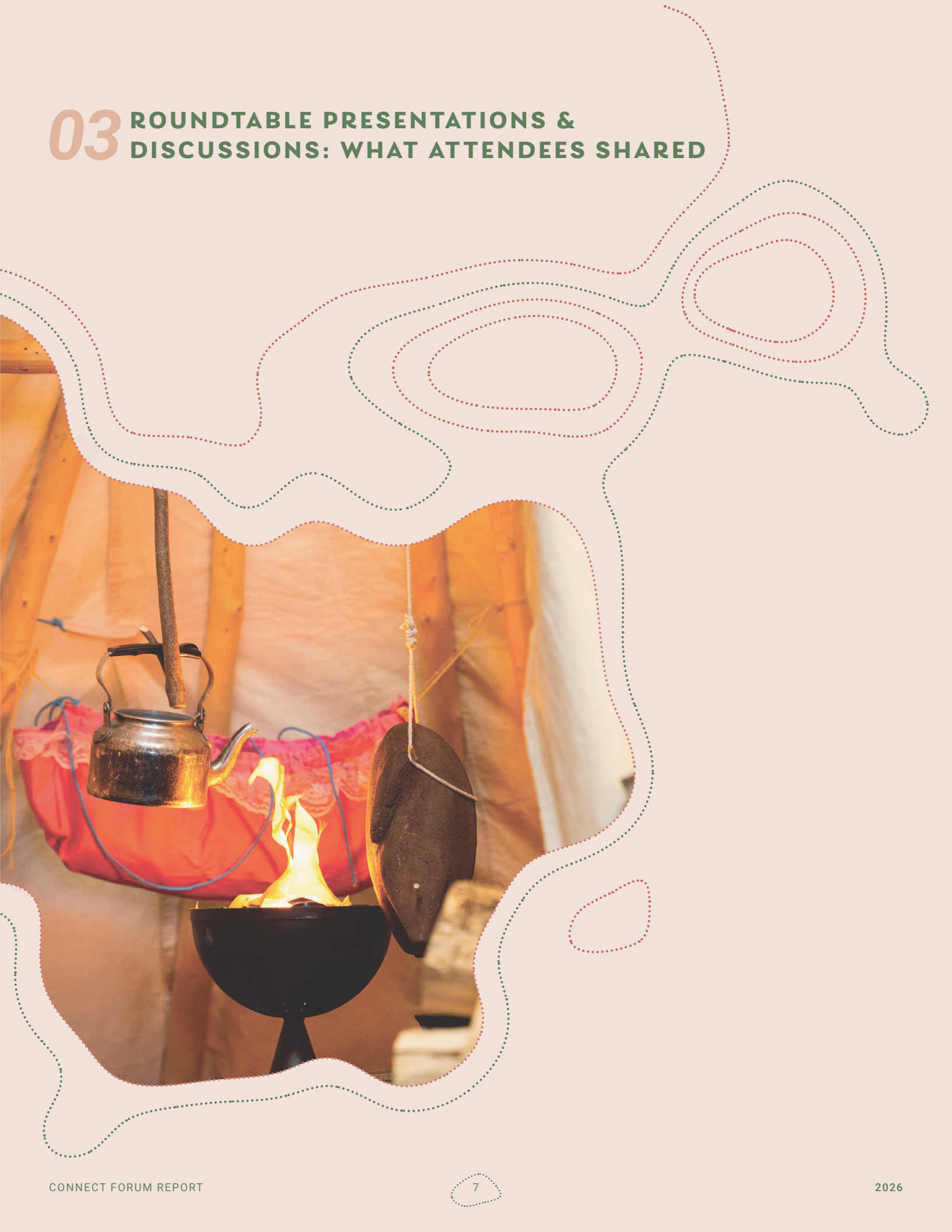
Across the Forum, participants described the same recurring pressures: housing shortages, homelessness, food insecurity, school absenteeism, mental health and addictions, youth protection pressures, chronic disease, violence, justice-system gaps, and the weakening of language, identity, and family supports. While each community has its own context, the overall message was consistent - communities are asking less for new stand-alone programs and more for existing organizations to work together in a coordinated way.

Attendees repeatedly emphasized the need to move from crisis response to prevention, from fragmented services to integrated action, and from isolated mandates to shared responsibility. The Forum highlighted the importance of culturally grounded approaches rooted in Cree language, family, land-based practice, and collective accountability.

The original set of 83 draft Calls to Action was consolidated into 36 refined Calls to Action across nine themes. These themes focus on governance and system integration, housing and basic needs, health and prevention, food security, family support, youth and education, justice and community safety, culture and identity, and economic inclusion.

The strongest conclusion emerging from the Forum was that follow-up is now essential. Participants called for a permanent coordination mechanism, shared protocols, common priorities, stronger accountability, and a commitment to continue this work beyond a single gathering.

03 ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSIONS: WHAT ATTENDEES SHARED



MESSAGES FROM LEADERSHIP

Welcoming remarks from the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, Cree School Board, and other leaders reinforced a shared principle: collaboration is no longer optional.

Grand Council of the Crees | Paul John Murdoch, Grand Chief & Linden Spencer, Deputy Grand Chief

Key messages:

- > Cree institutions do not know each other as well as they need to.
- > Institutions can fall into reactive exchanges when there is not enough mutual understanding, perspective, or face-to-face dialogue.



Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay | Jeannie Pelletier, Chairperson & Christina Biron, Executive Director

Key messages:

- > Health outcomes are determined by the conditions people live in every day (housing, employment, food access, family and social well-being).
- > Health is a collective responsibility.
- > Authentic engagement, recognition, and trust-building can help enable stronger collaboration.



Cree School Board | Sarah Pash, Chairperson & Caroline Mark, Director General

Key messages:

- > Educational outcomes are linked to wider community conditions.
- > Key issues include absenteeism, mental health concerns among students, literacy gaps, and the need for stronger involvement of families, Elders, and community partners.



“We cannot take for granted that we know each other's institutions. We need to spend time getting to know each other's institutions.”

- Grand Chief Paul John Murdoch

“When we realign our resources, efforts, and knowledge, we will create something much stronger and more meaningful for our people. This is the Cree way of working together, fostering partnership, respect, and unity.”

- Jeannie Pelletier, Chairperson

“We need community collaboration. We need elders in our schools, and we need partnerships such as CTA and cultural departments. We can't do this alone.”

- Sarah Pash, Chairperson

Overall, leadership speeches emphasized that:

- > Partnership must extend beyond symbolism and produce lasting change.
- > Families, children, and youth should be supported earlier, not only once they are already in crisis.
- > Cree culture, language, land-based practice, and family structures must be central to solutions.
- > Communities want systems that are simpler to navigate, more responsive, and better aligned.
- > Front-line workers must be supported and protected - culturally safe workplaces, debriefing supports, and healing-informed practice are all important to have in place.

Roundtable Presentations

Roundtable presentations from Eastmain, Wemindji, Oujé-Bougoumou, Waskaganish, Chisasibi, Mistissini, Waswanipi, Whapmagoostui, Nemaska, and MoCreebec showed strong overlap in the issues communities are confronting. Leaders described housing shortages, overcrowding, homelessness, addictions, violence, youth disconnection, chronic disease, unemployment, and family trauma as persistent and mutually reinforcing challenges.



Several communities shared examples of local innovation and progress: Eastmain's strategic focus on programming emphasizing health, education, attitude, and respect; Wemindji's collaboration through Miyupimaatisiun and school-linked programming; Oujé-Bougoumou's monthly partnership table; Waskaganish's priority areas; and Nemaska's public safety measures following firearm incidents. These examples demonstrated that communities are not waiting passively for change, but they also showed the limits of isolated local action without stronger regional coordination.

Speakers repeatedly linked visible crises - such as school absenteeism, suicide risk, drug trafficking, homelessness, and justice involvement - back to deeper issues of trauma, family instability, cultural disconnection, poverty, and systems that remain difficult to access.

FOCUS AREA	CURRENT SITUATION	OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS
Housing & Homelessness	Severe housing shortages across communities; overcrowding; homelessness (including people living in sheds, couch surfing); lack of shelters (especially for men and vulnerable populations)	Implement Housing First approaches; build shelters and transitional housing; integrate housing with social supports; develop community-driven housing solutions
Cost of Living & Poverty	Rising cost of living; food insecurity; income disparities; increasing reliance on financial assistance	Develop coordinated cost-of-living strategies; improve access to affordable food; strengthen financial literacy programs; align economic supports
Mental Health & Trauma	High levels of trauma (intergenerational, residential schools, COVID impacts); increased anxiety, depression, suicide ideation; limited access to specialized services	Expand culturally grounded mental health services; increase trauma-informed care; invest in land-based healing and aftercare supports
Addictions & Substance Abuse	Widespread drug and alcohol issues; youth involvement in drug activity; overdoses increasing; lack of aftercare services	Strengthen prevention programs; expand detox, treatment, and aftercare services; increase enforcement and community awareness
Community Safety & Crime	Increase in violence, weapons among youth, drug trafficking, and serious crimes; lack of justice follow-through; victims often unsupported	Strengthen community safety frameworks; improve enforcement and prevention; support restorative justice; enhance victim support services



FOCUS AREA	CURRENT SITUATION	OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS
Youth Engagement & Development	Youth disengagement, boredom, unemployment; exposure to drugs, violence, and social media influences; lack of identity and direction	Expand after-school programs, sports, and cultural initiatives; create mentorship programs; develop youth employment and skills training pathways
Education & Attendance	Low school attendance; high dropout rates; lack of motivation; parents struggling to support children academically	Strengthen attendance strategies; engage families; integrate cultural and land-based education; provide alternative learning pathways
Family & Parenting Challenges	Parenting gaps; intergenerational trauma; lack of support for young parents; children taking on adult responsibilities	Provide parenting programs; strengthen family supports; implement home-based interventions; promote shared responsibility in raising children
Cultural Identity & Language	Loss of Cree language and identity; reduced connection to land and traditional practices; youth disconnected from culture	Expand Cree language programs; promote land-based camps; integrate Elders and traditional teachings; strengthen cultural pride
Economic Participation & Employment	High unemployment rates (especially youth); lack of work ethic and motivation; limited local opportunities	Develop local training and employment programs; align economic development with workforce needs; promote skills development
Coordination & Collaboration Between Entities	Lack of collaboration between organizations; duplication of efforts; gaps in service delivery; “working in silos” identified repeatedly	Establish coordination tables; develop shared frameworks and protocols; improve communication and joint planning
Data & Decision-Making	Limited access to reliable local data; difficulty tracking issues such as crime, health, and social trends	Improve data collection and sharing; develop evidence-based planning tools; support community-level reporting systems
Justice & Reintegration	Weak reintegration supports for offenders; stigma; lack of justice committees in some communities; recurring cycles of crime	Strengthen reintegration programs; develop justice committees; expand restorative justice approaches; improve collaboration with justice systems
Community Engagement & Participation	Low participation in programs and workshops; lack of trust in systems; community members “suffering in silence”	Increase outreach and engagement strategies; build trust through consistent presence; create safe spaces for dialogue
Health & Chronic Diseases	High rates of diabetes and chronic illness; poor nutrition; sedentary lifestyles	Promote prevention through active lifestyles; implement nutrition policies; increase access to traditional foods
Infrastructure & Services Gaps	Lack of specialized services (mental health, special needs, shelters); outdated or insufficient infrastructure	Invest in new facilities; expand specialized services; strengthen regional support to communities

Overarching Observations

- > The most frequent concern was siloed action. Participants described repeated situations where one system identifies a risk, but there is no dependable protocol linking education, health, police, housing, justice, and community services.
- > Many communities are already experimenting with partnership tables, local safety plans, committees, and culturally grounded initiatives. The challenge is less about having no ideas and more about sustaining coordination, follow-up, and shared accountability.
- > The Forum consistently returned to families. Whether the topic was youth protection, addictions, chronic disease, absenteeism, or justice, participants reiterated that families need earlier, more practical support.
- > Cultural continuity was treated not as an optional add-on, but as a core part of prevention and healing. Land-based camps, Elders, traditional medicine, Cree language, rites of passage, and identity-building were all described as protective factors.
- > Participants called for common priorities, common language, better data, and common mechanisms for action so that good discussions are not lost after the meeting ends.



04 PRESENTATIONS: WHAT THE ATTENDEES HEARD



YOUTH PROTECTION AND FAMILY SUPPORTS

Presentation: Every Child Matters – A Vision for Culturally Grounded Youth Protection Services

Taria Matoush, CBHSSJB Director of Youth Protection

Presentation: aah chishtipistihch awaash-uschiniichisiu – Cree Youth Protection Commission

Jonathan Sutherland, CBHSSJB Assistant Executive Director

FOCUS AREA	CURRENT SITUATION	OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS
Youth Protection Systems	High volume of cases (2,400+ reports), reactive system, limited prevention, over-reliance on interventions	Shift to prevention-based model, strengthen early intervention and family-centered approaches
Family Support	Families lack consistent, coordinated support; services often intervene too late	Expand in-home wraparound supports; implement family group conferencing; strengthen parenting programs
Aging out Youth	Youth leaving care face homelessness, instability, lack of life skills	Develop transition programs, life plans, and independent living supports
Cultural Integration	Current system not fully aligned with Cree values (liyuu lituun)	Continue embedding cultural values, land-based healing, and Cree-led decision making in all interventions
Workforce Capacity	Staff burnout, high caseloads, limited retentions, trauma exposure	Invest in workforce training, trauma-informed care, and mental health supports for workers
Service Coordination	Silos between Youth Protection, health, justice, and community services	Strengthen inter-agency coordination, shared protocols, and joint case management (eg. Nisk model)



CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

Presentation: Childcare Programs and Services in Eeyou Istchee

Kelly-Lee Pepabano, CNG Director of Miyuuhpichinaausuwin Apatisiiwin, and Christine Duff, Coordinator of Childcare Services

FOCUS AREA	CURRENT SITUATION	OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS
Early childhood development	Gaps in access to daycare and early support programs, staffing challenges	Expand daycare services, head start outreach, and early childhood development programs
Children with Additional Needs	Limited resources and stigma around “special needs”, delayed identification	Improve early screening, inclusive programming, and culturally appropriate terminology and supports
Parenting Support	Parents require more guidance in child development and care	Implement parenting programs (e.g. Baby College, cradle-to-career models)
Workforce (Childcare staff)	Staff overextended, under-recognized, high expectations beyond formal roles	Increase recognition, training, and support for childcare workers
Cultural Integration	Need to better integrate Cree language and culture in early childhood programs	Expand Cree language use, Elders involvement, and culturally grounded curriculum
Program Coordination	Programs exist but operate in silos	Strengthen collaboration between childcare, education, health, and family services



EDUCATION AND STUDENT WELL-BEING

Presentation: Education Cree School Board

Sarah Pash, CSB Chairperson, Darlene Cheechoo, Deputy Director General of Adult & Higher Learning, Catherine Rutherford, Director of Complementary Services, Edith Sam, CSB Director of Education Services, Brandi Taylor, CSB Coordinator of Socio-Emotional Wellness, and Christine Duff, CSB Coordinator of Student Engagement

FOCUS AREA	CURRENT SITUATION	OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS
School Attendance	Low attendance rates, long-term impact on success	Implemented targeted attendance strategies; strengthen family and community engagement
Literacy & Learning Outcomes	Significant gaps in literacy and numeracy; long-term educational risks	Focus on early literacy (Grade 1-3), structured interventions, and reading programs
Mental Health & Well-being	Increased anxiety, depression, and social challenges post-COVID	Expand socio-emotional wellness programs, counselling, and crisis response supports
Youth Engagement	Students disengaged due to screen time, social media, and lack of motivation	Promote land-based learning, cultural programming, and extracurricular activities
Special Needs Support	Students with additional needs not adequately supported; misplacement in programs	Develop specialized programs, inclusive supports, and better-trained educators
Cultural Identity in Education	Integration of Cree history, language and identity	Strengthen Cree-centered curriculum, language immersion, and cultural education



HEALTH, DIABETES, JUSTICE, AND SAFETY

Presentation: Reducing the Impact of Diabetes and Chronic Diseases: Opportunities and Barriers

Dr. Maggie Odell, MD and Paul Linton, Senior Advisor for Public Health

Presentation: EEPF Stats 2025

Randy Kitchen, EEPF Inspector, and Steven Boudrias, EEPF Captain

Presentation: Our Department

Losty Mamianskum, CNG Manager of Correctional Services

FOCUS AREA	CURRENT SITUATION	OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS
Chronic Disease (Diabetes)	Rising diabetes rates; increasing dialysis cases; normalization of illness	Promote prevention through lifestyle changes, education, and land-based activities
Public Health & Prevention	Health system largely reactive; limited prevention efforts	Implement proactive health strategies, nutrition policies, and workplace wellness programs
Mental Health & Addictions	High levels of trauma, addiction, and psychosocial issues	Expand mental health services, detox programs, and long-term aftercare
Justice & Crime	Increase in serious crimes, drug activity, and youth involvement	Strengthen prevention, enforcement, and restorative justice approaches
Community Safety	High rates of suicide ideation, violence, and crisis calls	Develop coordinated safety frameworks and crisis response systems
First Responders	High exposure to trauma; limited psychosocial support	Provide dedicated mental health supports and debriefing systems
Reintegration & Rehabilitation	Limited support for offenders returning to community; stigma persists	Expand reintegration programs, life skills training, and community-based supports
Data & Planning	Limited access to local data for decision-making	Improve data collection, monitoring, and evidence-based planning

APATISIIWIN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

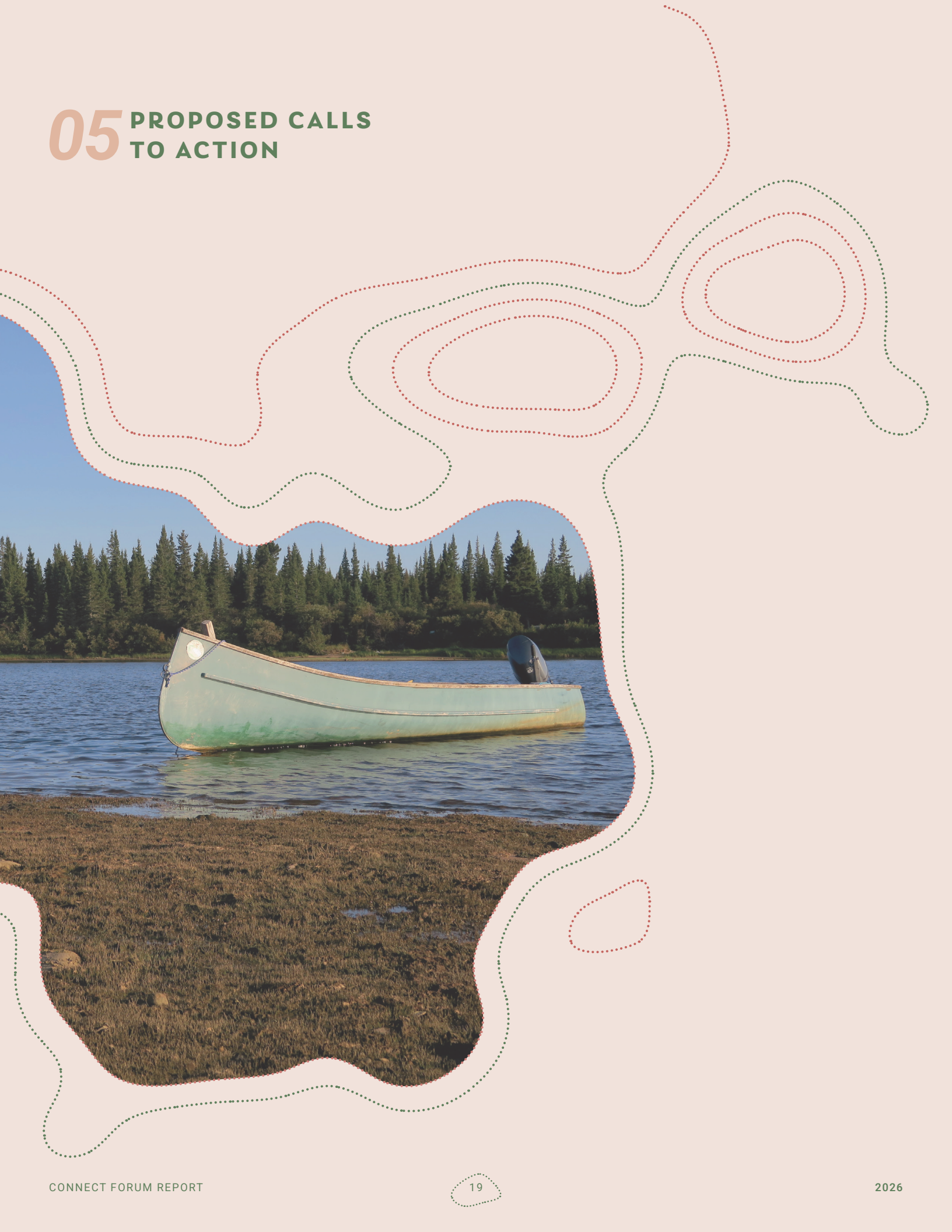
Presentation:

Due to time constraints, the CNG Apatisiwin Skills Development could not present. However, their presentation has been shared with all attendees.

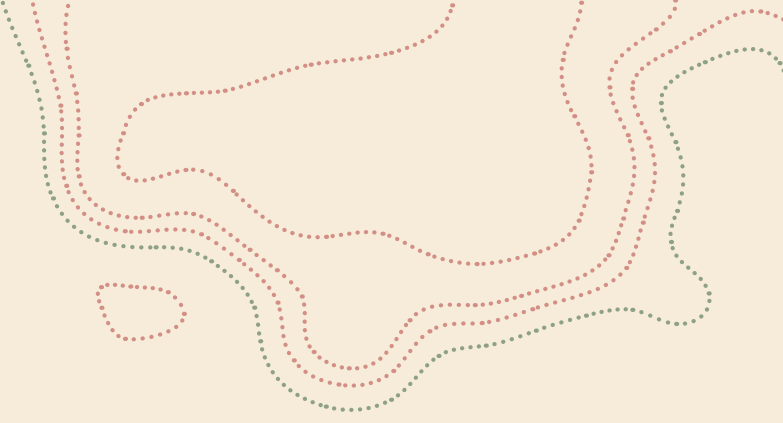
In its presentation, ASD summarizes a comprehensive review of socioeconomic and demographic trends in Eeyou Istchee using Canadian census data from 2001 – 2021. It indicates the robust demographic growth and labour market changes within the time period. Challenges remain in education, economic diversification, and adapting to an aging population. Strategic partnerships and targeted development are essential in realizing Eeyou Istchee’s potential.



05 PROPOSED CALLS TO ACTION



At the beginning of the Connect Forum, the Grand Chief mentioned that at any point during the event, attendees could get up and add their Calls to Action to the flip chart. A number of Chiefs also submitted their Calls to Action by email. In total, 83 Calls to Action were drafted. These were consolidated into 36 proposed Calls to Action by grouping overlapping items and organizing them into the following key themes:



**Governance,
Coordination
and System
Integration**



**Housing,
Infrastructure
and Basic
Needs**



**Health,
Wellness and
Prevention
Systems**



**Food Security,
Nutrition
and Traditional
Practices**



**Family,
Parenting
and Early
Intervention**



**Youth,
Education
and Capacity
Development**



**Justice,
Safety and
Community
Protection**



**Culture,
Identity and
Community
Well-Being**



**Economic
Development,
Workforce and
Inclusion**

The proposed Calls to Action (CTA) are as follows:

1. GOVERNANCE, COORDINATION AND SYSTEM INTEGRATION

CTA 1. Establish a permanent inter-agency coordination table with designated representatives and a central coordinator.

CTA 2. Develop a regional partnership framework with clear roles, accountability, and aligned mandates.

CTA 3. Create integrated communication, data-sharing protocols, and a centralized information system.

CTA 4. Establish formal follow-up, reporting, and accountability mechanisms with defined timelines and KPIs.

CTA 5. Align funding priorities to include Community Health and Safety and reduce bureaucratic barriers to access.

2. HOUSING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND BASIC NEEDS

CTA 6. Implement a Housing First approach grounded in equity, needs-based allocation, and depoliticized decision-making.

CTA 7. Align housing policies across regional entities and link housing to income, employment, and family stability.

CTA 8. Integrate housing with wraparound supports, including wellness, addictions, financial literacy, and employment.

CTA 9. Remove systemic barriers to housing, including for returning graduates and workers.

CTA 10. Promote community-led housing models that reinforce ownership, skills development, and family responsibility.

3. HEALTH, WELLNESS AND PREVENTION SYSTEMS

CTA 11. Shift all sectors from crisis response to prevention-based, holistic wellness approaches.

CTA 12. Establish a coordinated continuum of care from crisis to treatment, recovery, reintegration, and aftercare.

CTA 13. Implement joint case management and shared responsibility for high-risk individuals and families.

CTA 14. Expand access to mental health, addiction services, detox, and long-term aftercare supports.

CTA 15. Develop mentorship, reintegration, and life-skills pathways for individuals in recovery.

CTA 16. Normalize and de-stigmatize access to services and support.

4. FOOD SECURITY, NUTRITION AND TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

CTA 17. Develop and implement a Cree Nation Nutritional Policy integrated into laws, programs, and education systems.

CTA 18. Strengthen access to healthy and traditional foods through community systems such as freezers and sharing networks.

CTA 19. Establish local frameworks for the distribution, sharing, and sustainability of traditional food.

CTA 20. Address food insecurity and cost of living through coordinated, community-driven solutions.

5. FAMILY, PARENTING AND EARLY INTERVENTION

CTA 21. Implement coordinated early identification and intervention systems for at-risk families across sectors.

CTA 22. Provide integrated, in-home wraparound supports including parenting, mental health, and financial guidance.

CTA 23. Embed parenting education and life skills into schools, early childhood, and community programs.

CTA 24. Promote shared community responsibility in raising children and supporting families.

6. YOUTH, EDUCATION AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

CTA 25. Align education systems with Cree history, governance, culture, and community realities.

CTA 26. Develop accessible post-secondary, online, and career pathways aligned with local workforce needs.

CTA 27. Strengthen youth systems including attendance strategies, youth councils, and transition supports for youth in care.

CTA 28. Create structured pathways to retain and bring back talent to communities.

7. JUSTICE, SAFETY AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION

CTA 29. Strengthen community-based justice systems, including justice committees and Cree-led restorative justice models.

CTA 30. Improve reintegration, addiction support, and accountability systems for offenders while prioritizing victim safety.

CTA 31. Strengthen enforcement and prevention related to drugs, bootlegging, gun safety, and community crime.

CTA 32. Develop a coordinated community safety framework supported by data and inter-agency collaboration.

8. CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

CTA 33. Promote Cree language, culture, and land-based practices through education and community initiatives.

CTA 34. Strengthen the role of Elders, cultural programming, and knowledge transfer initiatives such as Nishiiyuu.

CTA 35. Promote community pride, responsibility, and cultural awareness among both local and non-local populations.

9. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, WORKFORCE AND INCLUSION

CTA 36. Align economic development, workforce training, and partnerships to support inclusive growth, strong work ethic, and local employment opportunities.

06 NEXT STEPS & IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The Forum was clear that success will depend less on drafting additional recommendations and more on how leadership chooses to organize follow-up. The most practical next step is to convert the Calls to Action into a shared implementation structure with clear ownership, timelines, and reporting. A permanent coordination table with a neutral facilitator or coordinator was one of the strongest operational recommendations raised during discussion.

Participants also emphasized that implementation must occur at multiple levels. Some actions require regional policy alignment, shared data systems, and funding decisions; others need local adaptation through community safety tables, school-community partnerships, housing processes, justice committees, and family support mechanisms. The report therefore points toward a dual approach: regionally aligned priorities with community-specific delivery models.

The Forum repeatedly showed that the cost of delayed action is visible in hospitalization, school dropout, homelessness, justice involvement, child welfare pressure, and worker burnout. Investing earlier - especially in children, families, food security, language, housing, and healing - was consistently described as both the right approach and the more sustainable one.



Suggested immediate next steps

- > Establish the Tri-Partite Leadership Table (CNG, CSB and CBHSSJB) as central oversight and decision-making body for the Connect Initiative, mandated to guide, coordinate, and ensure accountability for the implementation of the Calls to Action
- > Review, analyze and finalize Calls to Action
- > Develop an implementation matrix with leads, partners, timelines, and indicators for the Calls to Action (sample structure - Appendix A)
- > Each regional stakeholder (CNG, CSB, CBHSSJB) to identify and commit to 3 Calls to Action for Phase 1 of implementation.
- > Develop a monitoring and reporting system to track cross-organizational progress on the Calls to Action (integrated into existing tracking systems used by partners, if applicable).
- > Schedule a formal progress review and require follow-up reporting from participating entities.
- > Identify next Connect Forum initiative events (e.g. Sec. II/Adult Ed., Trauma & Addictions, and Early Child Education).

07 CONCLUSION

The Connect Forum created a rare and important space for Cree leadership, institutions, and communities to speak candidly about what is happening across Eeyou Istchee. The conversations confirmed that the issues are urgent, interconnected, and widely shared - but they also confirmed that many strengths already exist within communities, organizations, and Cree ways of working together.

The Forum's strongest message was simple: the path forward is collaborative. Whether the issue is youth protection, absenteeism, housing, diabetes, violence, justice, or language loss, progress will depend on sustained partnership, mutual accountability, and the willingness to move beyond silos. Participants repeatedly called for action that is coordinated, culturally grounded, and focused on families, children, and future generations.

In that sense, the Forum should be understood not as an endpoint, but as a foundation. The challenge now is to maintain momentum, formalize shared structures, and turn the Calls to Action into visible change in the lives of Eeyouch/Eenouch and communities.



APPENDIX

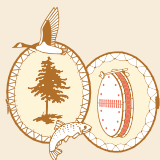
Appendix A: Planning Framework for Next Steps

CTA	PRIORITY (1-5)	STATUS & CURRENT INITIATIVES	ROLE OF CSB	ROLE OF CBHSSJB	ROLE OF CNG	ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS	ROLE OF OTHER ORGANIZATIONS
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Theme:

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

	Priority level + Entity leading efforts (e.g. CSB - 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Currently we have [insert asset] > CSB working on [insert project] > CBHSSJB working on [insert project] > CNG working on [insert project] > [insert committee/group] meets 2x a year about this topic 					



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Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)
Grand Conseil des Cris (Eeyou Istchee)

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Cree Nation Government
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