



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada



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Holistic Water Security Assessment Checklist

A self-reflection tool for Indigenous women in all their diversity, to assess water-related risks in their homes, communities, and Nations.

HOLISTIC WATER SECURITY ASSESSEMENT CHECKLIST

Across Canada, many Indigenous communities continue to experience water advisories, contamination, and failing infrastructure which interrupts their daily access to safe water. Indigenous women have long held responsibilities to water as water carriers; however, as water concerns increasingly arise, Indigenous women must now also carry the physical, emotional, spiritual, and caregiving weight of such difficult circumstances.

This checklist is one of the deliverables under the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), Water Carriers Project, funded by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). In response to the ongoing concerns of water insecurity in Indigenous communities, this community-facing tool was developed to be used by Indigenous women in all their diversity when identifying and assessing water-related risks in their homes, communities, and Nations.



Acknowledgement:

This checklist was created with the guidance of, and feedback from, Indigenous women in all their diversity who attended various virtual and in-person workshops, engagement sessions, and roundtables as part of the Water Carriers project (2020-2026).

Photos from the Carrying the Water Forward: Indigenous-Led Water Monitoring Workshops in Winnipeg, MB (September 10-11, 2025) and Edmonton, AB (September 15-16, 2025).



GOAL OF THE CHECKLIST

The goal of this checklist is to support Indigenous women in all their diversity, from coast to coast to coast, who are experiencing water concerns in their homes, communities, and Nations. This checklist will help users reflect on their water, identify strengths, and see where attention may be needed.

This checklist is designed to holistically assess overall water security, recognizing the interconnection between drinking water and source water, as well as governance, health, caregiving responsibilities, and cultural relationships to water. The topics included reflect recurring themes raised directly by Indigenous women throughout Water Carriers engagements and workshops.

By addressing Indigenous women directly, this checklist acknowledges their leadership, lived experience, and responsibilities as Water Carriers within their households and communities. Indigenous women in all their diversity are central to advancing equitable water systems and strengthening water governance.

Whether used individually or in collaboration with community, this checklist serves as a stepping stone for Indigenous women in all their diversity to lead deeper dialogues, advocacy, and ideally more equitable water systems.



How to Use Checklist

What follows is a series of reflective questions that explore multiple dimensions of water security, including **access, safety, affordability, governance, and cultural connection**.

This checklist includes nine sections: **Access and Availability; Drinking Water Safety and Quality; Affordability and Infrastructure; Source Water and Environment; Governance and Leadership; Cultural Connection and Ceremony; Health and Wellbeing; Women, Children, Youth, and Elders; and Caretaking Responsibilities and Support**. These topic areas were selected to reflect the lived experiences shared by Indigenous women during Water Carriers engagements, and to acknowledge the far-reaching impacts of water insecurity.

For communities who have strong water security, most of these statements would reflect their lived reality. As you complete this checklist, any statements which do not reflect your experience of water is an opportunity to name your realities, advocate for their needs, and initiate conversations with decision makers in such areas.

For each question, check one of the following:

Yes | **Sometimes** | **No**

Use the **Reflection Guide** at the end to interpret your responses and consider next steps.

Not every question may apply to your specific water situation. Use this tool as it suits your needs, whether that be completing it in full or by selecting sections most relevant to your circumstance.

If answering these questions brings up frustration, grief, or anger: that is valid. You do not need to complete this checklist all at once. Take breaks and skip questions as needed.





Access and Availability

This section is the basics - looking at whether water is consistently available in your home and community, and if it is reliable for everyone – including those with additional needs.

<p>I have clean, running water in my home 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>Total YES: _____ Total SOMETIMES: _____ Total NO: _____</p>
<p>Water outages or service disruptions are rare and repaired quickly.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Remote households in my community have equal access to safe water.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>People with mobility or physical disabilities in my community have safe and easily accessible water in their homes.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>My community has a plan for accommodating community water needs during emergency shortages/water advisories.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>I can collect or purchase drinking water for my household without needing to travel long distances.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	





Drinking Water Safety and Quality

This section focuses on whether drinking water is safe, clean, and can be trusted for everyday household needs.

My home or community is free of any water advisories (such as boil, do-not-use, or do-not-consume advisories).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<p>Total YES: _____ Total SOMETIMES: _____ Total NO: _____</p>
My household water looks, smells, and tastes clean and natural.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
I can safely consume tap water (drinking and cooking) without worry.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
I can safely use tap water for all hygienic needs (such as bathing and cleaning) without worry.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	





Affordability and Infrastructure

This section reflects on whether water systems are financially sustainable and properly maintained.

<p>I can afford all water-related costs (bills, bottled water, filters, or transport of water) without it causing financial strain for my household.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>Total YES: _____ Total SOMETIMES: _____ Total NO: _____</p>
<p>My community's water treatment plant or system is staffed with trained operators.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Operators experience adequate training and support to maintain safe systems.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Repairs or upgrades to water infrastructure are done on time and the community is notified.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	





Source Water and Environment

This section considers the health of rivers, lakes, springs, and the lands which water flows through.

<p>The rivers, lakes, or springs near my community are free from visible pollution (oily sheen, trash, unnatural smells).</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>My community has protections in place for source water (e.g., land-use rules, monitoring, or water stewardship plans).</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>My community is consulted by any nearby industrial activities (mining, agriculture, forestry) in monitoring and regulating water which may be impacted.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>My community plans for climate-related water risks, such as flooding, drought, wildfire impacts, etc.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>The rivers, lakes, and wetlands around my community support healthy fish, plants, and wildlife.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>Total YES: _____ Total SOMETIMES: _____ Total NO: _____</p>





Governance and Leadership

This section looks at decision-making and leadership related to water, considering whether Indigenous women in all their diversity, have meaningful inclusion in such processes.

<p>Indigenous women have timely and transparent access to water-related information, including water test results, advisory details, and decisions that affect community water systems.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>Total YES: _____ Total SOMETIMES: _____ Total NO: _____</p>
<p>Indigenous women are welcome to share their concerns, knowledge, and lived experiences related to water in community meetings, leadership spaces, or decision-making tables.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>My community encourages voluntary water stewardship programs for our waterways, particularly for women and young girls.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Our Nation/community is involved in government-to-government decision-making tables where representatives have authority to participate fully in water management.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Indigenous women are involved in these government-to-government decision-making processes related to water, with real authority, not symbolic representation.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Current water management in our community respects Indigenous laws, ceremony, and women's protocols as Water Carriers, alongside technical and scientific approaches to water management.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	

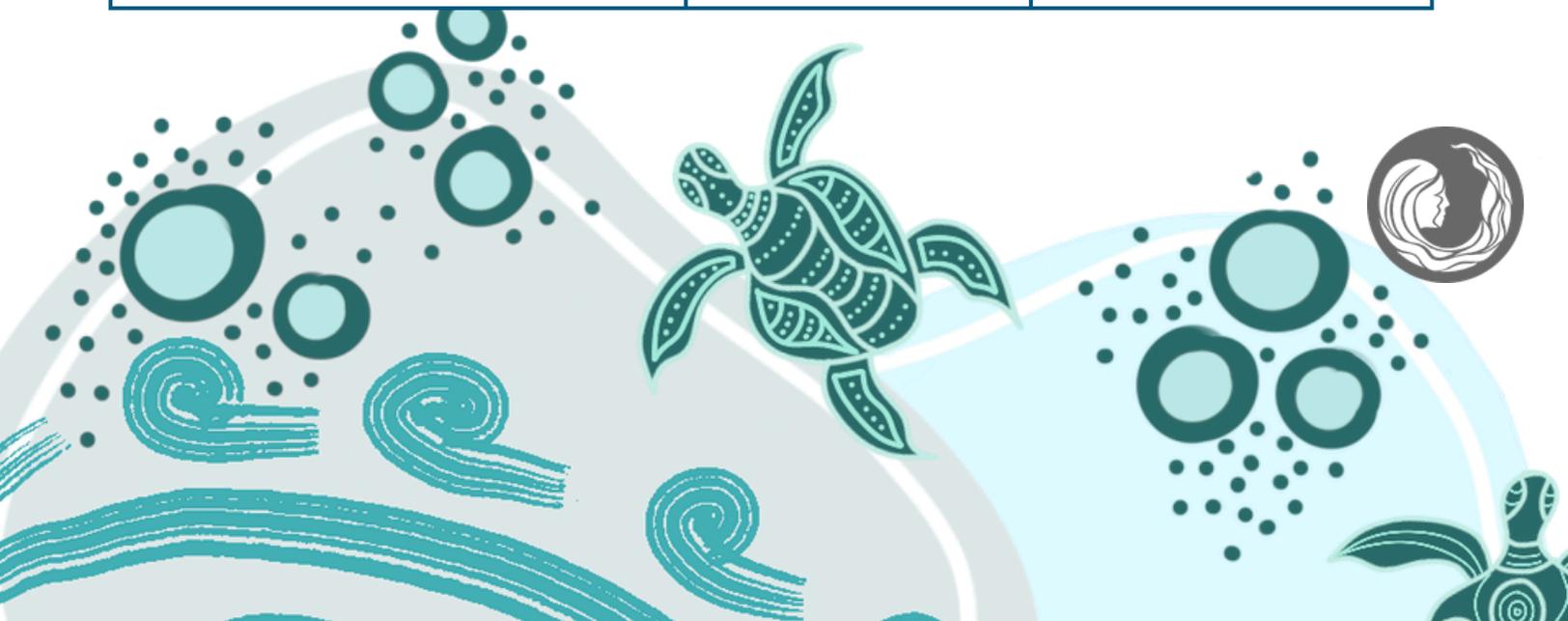


Cultural Connection and Ceremony

This section reflects on the spiritual, cultural, and relational dimensions of water, considering whether water is honoured as a living relative.



<p>We have safe ceremonial access to lakes, rivers, and springs.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>Total YES: _____ Total SOMETIMES: _____ Total NO: _____</p>
<p>Women in all their diversity, continue to lead water teachings and ceremonies.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Youth and children are included in learning about the sacred relationship with water.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>The water in and around our community is honoured as a living relative, not just a resource.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	





Health and Wellbeing

This section considers the physical, emotional, and mental health impacts of water conditions.

Members of my household are safe from experiencing physical health issues that may be linked to water (e.g., rashes, stomach pain, headaches, or more severe illnesses).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<p>Total YES: _____ Total SOMETIMES: _____ Total NO: _____</p>
There is awareness in my community about how to report water-related health concerns.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Local health services and clinics are aware of water conditions and have the capacity to manage related illnesses.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
When water advisories or contamination occur, clear health guidance is provided to community members.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Pregnant women, children, Elders, or those with vulnerable health have access to additional water supplies when needed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
My community offers mental health supports for those affected by water insecurity.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	



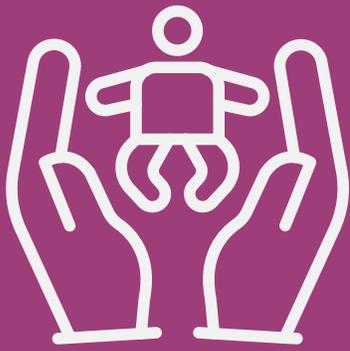


Women, Children, Youth, and Elders

This section focuses on intergenerational water impacts and supports, considering whether children, youth, and Elders, have equal access to water programs and services.

Schools and daycares have safe drinking water and functional plumbing.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Children learn about water safety and teachings in school or from community programs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Elders can safely access and use water for daily living, cultural practices, and ceremony.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Pregnant women and families with infants have reliable access to safe water for drinking, preparing formula, bathing, or daily care.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Families caring for children and Elders receive equitable support to access safe water, regardless of income, mobility, or health needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
My community has plans in place to ensure sufficient water for our future generations.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
		Total YES: _____ Total SOMETIMES: _____ Total NO: _____





Caretaking Responsibilities and Support

This section reflects on whether women and caretakers are supported in managing water-related labour.

Caregiving for children, Elders, or relatives is manageable even during water advisories or shortages.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Total YES: _____ Total SOMETIMES: _____ Total NO: _____
My community provides practical support (e.g., resources, childcare, or kinship) to women carrying water-related responsibilities.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
There are opportunities for women to build skills in water testing, monitoring, and protecting water.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
I have enough time and energy for rest, work, family, and self beyond water-related duties.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Overall Total YES: _____

Overall Total SOMETIMES: _____

Overall Total No: _____



Reflection and Next Steps

Now that you have completed the checklist, take a moment to review your responses. This table is not meant to grade your community. Instead, it is designed to help you interpret patterns in your answers and identify where water systems are strong, and where additional attention, advocacy, or support may be needed.

Remember: Water insecurity is not an individual failure. It reflects broader systems, infrastructure gaps, governance, and historical realities that have disproportionately impacted Indigenous communities.

Count your total number of “Yes” responses and review the guide below.

Your Total “Yes” Answers (out of 45)	Meaning	Next Steps
34 or more	Your community shows strong indicators of water security . Access, safety, and care systems appear stable, and your community is actively protecting the water and its people.	Continue strengthening what is working. Support intergenerational teaching, ceremony, and caretaking practices. Ensure Indigenous women in all their diversity remain central to leadership and long-term planning. Consider sharing successful practices with neighbouring communities.
23-33	You have partial water security : some areas are reliable, while others may be inconsistent or vulnerable.	Review sections where you answered “No” or “Sometimes.” Bring these reflections into circles, community meetings, or discussions with leadership. Work with community members, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and youth to identify local actions and needed supports.
22 or fewer	Water insecurity is significant. Health, caregiving, or governance challenges are likely to affect daily life and well-being.	Document your experiences and share them with trusted advocates, Indigenous organizations, or decision-makers. Bring your checklist results to community meetings, engagements, or band councils to start conversations about change. Use your answers to request clean water funding, stronger accountability from leadership and governments, and ensure Indigenous women’s voices are included in all water decisions moving forward. You do not have to navigate these challenges alone.



HOW TO USE YOUR RESULTS

1 **Reflect**
Look for patterns in your answers, which areas had the least Yes answers?

2 **Discuss**
Bring your reflections into community meetings, Elder-youth gatherings, or water-related sharing circles /engagements /consultations. Shared dialogue can strengthen collective understanding.

3 **Act**
Use your results to advocate for resources, infrastructure, or community training. Indigenous women's voices are powerful tools for change.

4 **Revisit**
Water conditions change with the seasons, try completing this checklist again every 6-12 months or after major events (floods, advisories, droughts, or upgrades).



CLOSING REFLECTION

Across the country, water insecurity continues to impact Indigenous communities: threatening health, livelihoods, ceremony, and spirit.

Behind every boil-water advisory are the families and caregivers who carry the daily work of gathering, boiling, and protecting what should be freely available to all. This checklist is meant to help make those realities visible, and to remind every Indigenous woman who completes it that her voice is a powerful tool for change.

Through the **Water Carriers Project**, NWAC recognizes that water security cannot exist without Indigenous women's leadership in all their diversity. We encourage all Indigenous women to use this checklist as a tool of self-determination: to assess, advocate, and lead solutions that restore balance to their communities and waters. Together, we can ensure that water security is not a promise deferred, but a reality led by the matriarchs who carry the water forward.

