



**SUMMARY REPORT:  
CREATING EQUITABLE SERVICES FOR  
MUSLIM WOMEN IN  
WATERLOO REGION**

**A Community Needs Assessment**

**April 2021**



**Women and Gender  
Equality Canada**

**Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada**



**Coalition of  
Muslim Women**  
Kitchener-Waterloo

## SUMMARY REPORT

The purpose of this Community Needs Assessment was to determine the programming needs of Muslim Women within Waterloo Region. This included identifying barriers to access as well as opportunities for improved service delivery. A mixed methods research approach was used to gather information, experiences, and ideas from more than 600 individuals. Data was collected on 6 thematic areas: Employment, Young People, Community Harm and Hate Crimes, Family Harm, Mental Health and Financial Independence. Specific findings are provided for nine cultural and language communities in an effort to reflect the diversity within the Muslim community.

This Community Needs Assessment also sought information, opinions, and ideas from Waterloo Region's service providers. This included organizations providing social services, community services, and cultural and faith-based organizations.

The Coalition of Muslim Women of KW pursued this project not to evaluate and assess their organization's menu of programs, but instead to provide a needs assessment to service providers across the community. The goal was to give voice to Muslim women in Waterloo Region, and allow them to speak to service providers about their experiences, needs, hopes, and wants.

You will hear the voices of the women who participated in this Community Needs Assessment throughout this report – and we do encourage you to take the time to read and reflect on what these women are saying. As the report authors, we were overwhelmed by the amount of data, ideas, and input that we received (and we cannot express enough thanks to the hundreds of Muslim women who participated), and worked hard to organize this overwhelming amount of information while presenting these women's voices as clearly, honestly, and unvarnished as possible. We were fortunate to have many open, brave, and honest conversations with these women, and hope that we have accurately reflected their input.

While reading the full report is required to take in the diverse voices and opinions, for ease of the intended audience – service providers, community groups and organizations, and institutions such as local municipalities and the police

"The biggest challenge is the visible challenge...Layers of clothing, hijab, and automatically assumptions are made about you that you don't speak English, you're not as educated as them, you don't belong. Once you break that barrier, then you still have the barriers of being a woman. The phobias and preconceived notions of oppression, etc. As a Black, Muslim, woman, immigrant, now there are four things against me that feed into what people think I can't do."

-Interviewee

service – the authors have reflected on what we heard from participants, and made general recommendations. It is our hope that these recommendations begin, or contribute to vital conversations in the community. These recommendations are based on the input we received, and are our interpretation of actions that our community can take to better serve Muslim women, and we hope, create a more welcoming, just, and equitable community.

## LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In the last section of the full report you will find the full list of 35 recommendations for the community, with expanded explanations. This condensed list of recommendations is presented here as a high-level summary.

### General

- *Mainstream agencies should assess their knowledge- and service-gaps that may lead to an overreliance on grassroots racialized-, religious-, and/or ethnocultural-focused organizations, and should:*
  - *Conduct research into the frequency and breadth of support requests made to these organizations.*
  - *Provide financial compensation for the expertise of these organizations.*
  - *Work with religious- and culturally-focused organizations to build a service map to clarify roles and interactions.*
- *Local funders should consider additional resources to support grassroots racialized-, religious-, and/or ethnocultural-focused organizations.*

"There's a lot of dependency on grassroots organizations to do the work that mainstream organizations are getting funding to do. They have that connection [grassroots] but the mainstream doesn't have that same connection."

-Interviewee

### Access to Service

- *Service providers could locate, engage, or partner with faith communities to offer programs that are 'endorsed' by the communities the program aims to serve.*
- *The use of peer support workers to engage isolated communities should be continued and expanded.*
- *A backbone organization should explore increased funding for local interpretation, or an umbrella subscription to telephone interpretation services that could be shared with service providers throughout the community.*

- *Funders and planning tables should continue to examine the geographic distribution of services, and support Cambridge-based organizations to expand supports.*

I always want to make sure service providers align with my values. A lot of the services are not reflective what the Muslim Women needs."

-Focus Group Participant

### Community Harm

- *Establish a live reporting number for hate incidents supporting people to report, and provide immediate connection to counselling.*

### Domestic Violence

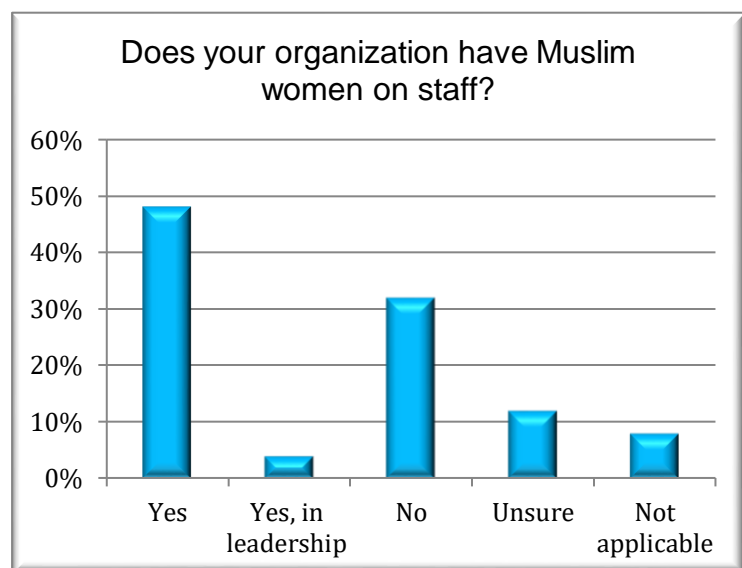
- *Domestic Violence organizations should:*
  - *Establish or partner with a peer worker program to engage diverse communities and increase pathways to support.*
  - *Post photos of what the shelter and its rooms look like, and hold open houses houses for faith, organization, and community leaders; highlight/clarify if Halal food, prayer room, interpretation, etc. is available.*
- *Service providers should work with grassroots racialized-, religious-, and/or ethnocultural-focused organizations to increase social and emotional support groups for separated or divorced Muslim women.*
- *The development of a shelter for Muslim women warrants further study.*

### Employment Services

- *Employment service agencies should provide specific resources and programs for clients experiencing workplace discrimination*

### Equitable Employment

- *Service providers need to:*
  - *Hire people who are representative of the community.*



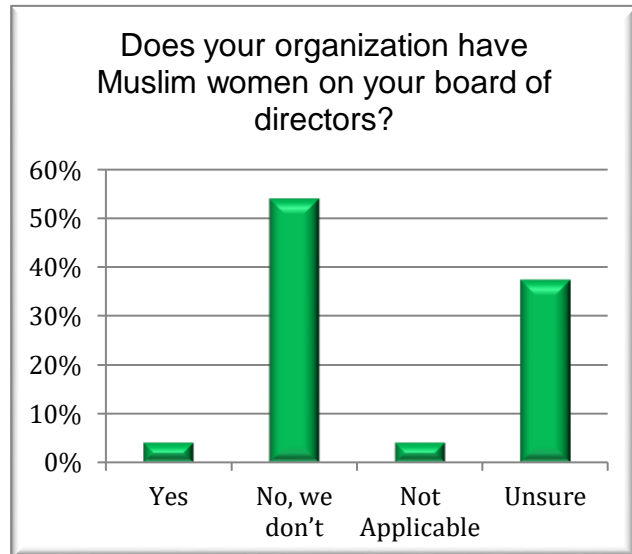
- Hire Muslim women (and other racialized and marginalized people) for, and promote beyond, front-line roles.
- Implement equitable hiring policies and invest in their staff members to position them for advancement.

### Financial Independence

- Establish a community trustee where women can hold their money separately and confidentially.

### Leadership

- To support equitable representation on local boards, the community should:
  - Establish/support a service in the community that links organizations to BIPOC board members and provides guidance and support to organizations on anti-racism, decolonization, equity, and inclusion.
  - Establish an ongoing leadership program to support people from marginalized groups or with lived experience with the knowledge, encouragement, and connections to participate on local boards.
- Funders should consider a fund to support people from marginalized groups or with lived experience with resources to participate on local boards.



### Mental Health

- Mental health service providers should:
  - Build stronger partnerships with faith leaders and cultural communities to increase uptake of supports.
  - Develop partnerships with professionals and organizations in other communities to increase access to counsellors with shared language, religion, or culture.

- *Distribute information about available supports, written in a variety of languages, through local high schools.*
- *Create a multimedia campaign featuring members of a variety of ethnic/linguistic/religious communities explaining their mental health experience and resources that are available.*

“Although diversity is at the core of these places, it is not what happens in practice. I appreciate what they are intending to respect diversity, but I don’t see that there. There is still a long way to go.”

-----  
-Focus Group Participant

## **Policing**

- *As a start to build strengthened relationships, the Police Service should:*
  - *establish a paid peer navigator program in partnership with grassroots racialized-, religious-, and/or ethnocultural-focused organizations.*
  - *establish a direct reporting line for incidences where the police are dismissive, racist, or exhibit prejudice.*
  - *expand efforts to send police to community events to sit and engage with people.*
  - *fund a neutral, arms-length engagement process with ethnic, religious, and language communities to hear concerns and ideas for systemic reforms.*

## **Youth**

- *Local mental health organizations should distribute information about available supports, written in a variety of languages, through local high schools.*
- *Service providers should work with grassroots racialized-, religious-, and/or ethnocultural-focused organizations to offer co-ed or targeted programs that are more comfortable for female youth and their caregivers.*

“Police believe two things about Muslim women. They are dumb and they are traumatized. Police are starting their conversations with these ideas in their minds.”

-----  
- Focus Group Participant



**Suggested Citation:**

Butcher, L. & Dearlove, C. (2021) Creating Equitable Services for Muslim Women in Waterloo Region A *Community Needs Assessment*. Coalition of Muslim Women of KW.



Women and Gender  
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada



**Coalition of Muslim Women of KW**

65 Hanson Avenue, Kitchener, Ontario  
519-576-5040 ext. 3468  
[cmw.info@cmw-kw.org](mailto:cmw.info@cmw-kw.org)  
[cmw-kw.org](http://cmw-kw.org)

*Follow us on social media using the links below!*

 [twitter.com/cmw\\_kw2010](https://twitter.com/cmw_kw2010)

 [facebook.com/CoalitionOfMuslimWomen.KW/](https://facebook.com/CoalitionOfMuslimWomen.KW/)

 [instagram.com/cmw.kw](https://instagram.com/cmw.kw)

 [youtube.com/user/CoalitionMuslimWomen](https://youtube.com/user/CoalitionMuslimWomen)