



THE ALBERTA MEN'S NETWORK

**Community. Practice. Research. Equity Movement.**

**Latino Men's Wellbeing  
Community Support Group**

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# LATINO MEN'S WELLBEING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

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# TREATY 7 TERRITORY LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Alberta Men's Network acknowledges that we organize, work, live and build community on the traditional homelands of the Blackfoot Confederacy: the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani; their Treaty 7 cosignatories: the Tsuut'ina and Îyâxe Nakoda Nations; the Métis (MNA Region 3) and those who call Calgary (Mohkinstsis) home. We recognize, as settlers and guests, that we are on Indigenous homelands and express our gratitude and appreciation for the Indigenous people who live here and have shared their knowledge. We are committed to taking action on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 Calls to Action (2015) and the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Reclaiming Power and Place (2019).

## APPRECIATION

### **(Trainers and those who helped along the way):**

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# INTRODUCTION

## LATINO MEN'S WELLBEING COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP

In 2015, The Alberta Men's Survey was conducted throughout the province by a culturally-diverse team of community based researchers with the Alberta Men's Network. The study highlighted a tremendous need for targeted support in the community, with an overwhelming 96% of respondents reporting that men "need support for wellbeing and healthy relationships". When asked what types of supports men would use, 66% indicated that peer support groups would be beneficial. Among over 2200 respondents, 615 (28%) identified as "immigrants"(Lorenzetti, Lantion, Murwisi, Hoyt, Oliphant, Sadhwani, Oshchepkova, & Este, 2016). This group highlighted specific enablers and barriers to their wellbeing, which included financial and professional challenges, interpersonal relationships, and trauma. With the findings of this study in mind, facilitator Fanny Oliphant developed a community-focused workshop series for Latino men based on over ten years of counselling knowledge and experience. The Latino Men's Community Support Group, which Fanny co-facilitated with Marco Lopez, Herbert Campos, and with the research support of Verónica Chirino, explored concepts of wellness, healthy relationships, gender equity, immigration, domestic violence and racism by employing a model that provided a safe space for men to come together to support each other through the commonality of their experience of masculinity and fatherhood. This community brief is intended to provide an overview of the curriculum and participant outcomes from the first Support Group, conducted in Spanish with 10 participants.

“ WHEN ASKED WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORTS MEN WOULD USE, 66% INDICATED THAT PEER SUPPORT GROUPS WOULD ”



# WHO IS ALBERTA MEN'S NETWORK?

The Alberta Men's Network is a community committed to nonviolence and working across the gender spectrum to create healthy families and communities. We are supported by a number of community partners including Men's Action Network Calgary, Alberta Network of Immigrant Women and the University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work. We support healthy masculinities and gender equity by identifying and working within a human rights, feminist, anti-racist and anticolonial framework. AMN is made up of dedicated members who belong to community, non-profit, academic, social service, government, business, and other sectors in Alberta. Our human rights anticolonial lens is a firm foundation to build community supports and programs to transform our structures and the social norms that perpetuate violence and inequality. We work inclusively with men from diverse backgrounds and across genders to foster peer-support and share knowledge of community supports and services. With diversity as our strength, AMN believes that cultural humility, respect, and solidarity through love are cornerstones of men's violence prevention work. Through the development of an online and in-person resource network, AMN supports men and their families and communities to access supports, improve and maintain healthy relationships, learn about various aspects of their mental health, and develop and contribute to positive peer networks for richer community supports.



Alberta Men's Network Men's Talk event

“AMN BELIEVES THAT CULTURAL HUMILITY, RESPECT, AND SOLIDARITY THROUGH LOVE ARE CORNERSTONES OF MEN'S VIOLENCE PREVENTION WORK.”

# WHAT IS HUMAN RIGHTS AND ANTICOLONIAL WORK WITH MEN?

AMN works to promote healthy and positive masculinities by recognizing and working to end all forms of oppression, including, patriarchy and gender inequity, colonization, racism, white privilege, economic inequality, gender and sexual stigma, ableism, and other forms of dehumanization. We understand that historical relationships of power and oppression create various levels of marginalization and social exclusion, which maintain enduring systemic inequality over generations. In the Canadian context, historical and intergenerational trauma through European colonization and ongoing colonial relations maintain white, male hetero/cisgender privilege. This resonates with the histories of communities around the world. Human rights organizations worldwide recognize the need to involve men in gender equity work, in capacity-building and peer mentorship roles as primary strategies for the prevention of gender-based violence and intersectional oppression. Building on this momentum, organizations and communities in Alberta have important roles to play in shifting social norms and advocating for progressive social changes.



## LITERATURE AND CONTEXT

A brief review of the literature suggests that factors impacting mental health for recent immigrants to Canada include discrimination, social exclusion, and economic hardship such as unemployment or underemployment (Robert & Gilkinson, 2012). Immigrants with lower income are also more likely to report a high level of stress, with young people reporting that they often feel like they live in an anti-immigrant climate (Rodriguez et al, 2018). For Latino men in Canada, there is limited literature discussing the factors which exacerbate stress and those that positively contribute to well-being.

A survey study in Alberta (Oliphant et al., 2018) with 132 Latino-Canadian male respondents showed that most identified needing supports to increase their wellbeing (92%) but most were unable to identify where they could access them.

The study recommended culturally significant programs to better reach Latino-Albertan men who are currently isolated from supports and suggested that faith and spirituality be integrated as a pathway to support.

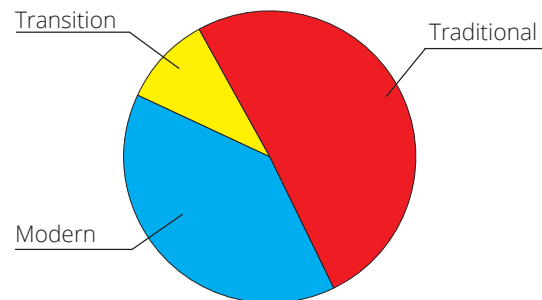
As demonstrated in the literature, many men struggle with dominant masculinity norms and expectations, which can increase the use of violence against women and girls. Rigid gender norms also perpetuate stigma and violence against males, trans folk and anyone who is labeled as non-conforming (Sandfort, Melendez, & Diaz, 2007).

Gender stereotypes “perpetuate the idea that difference is negative, and that fluid or diverse interpretations of gender will have high psychological, social, economic, and safety costs for those who transgress the established norms” (Lorenzetti et al., 2017, p.178).

Furthermore, language barriers were a recurring theme that posed barriers to accessing mainstream services, with adults and youth alike expressing discomfort in seeking support from police, children services, or taking medical advice from doctors they couldn’t understand (Viveros-Guzmán, Arcadio, & Gertler, Michael, 2015; Rodriguez et al, 2018; Vandommelen-Gonzalez, 2014).

An earlier mixed-methods study in Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua) by the Central American University, Centro de Análisis Sociocultural (CEPAL), and the UN (Hegg et al., 2005), highlighted the relationship between gender roles, masculinity, and violence.

Using survey research, focus groups and individual interviews, the authors created a masculinity index with three separate categories: traditional man, modern man, and man in transition. Of the total number of respondents (N = 4,790), 51% were classified as traditional, 39% as modern, and 10% as being in transition (Hegg et al., 2005).



Importantly, traditional men expressed their support for gender-role segregation and the use of authoritarian approaches, including “force” in their perceived role as head of the family; enlightened men displayed a more equitable view of shared responsibilities and decision-making with their female partners; men in transition were viewed as holding various conflicting perspectives on their identities, vacillating between traditional and modern man (Hegg et al., 2005).

While gender identity cannot be viewed as static, this study underscores the importance of transformative learning with men as a primary approach to addressing violence and promoting well-being.

While differing across several socio-economic and geographic domains, the international literature on masculinities is comparable to Latino men in Canada because patriarchy and domestic violence are global issues. With Canada's multicultural context increasingly diverse, characterized by one in five Canadians born outside of the country (Statistics Canada, 2016) more Canadian research and community practices, are needed to promote healthy masculinity among diverse populations of men in Canada. These include studies and practices that examine unique community and cultural contexts, and cross-cultural realities.

As a group of community organizers, violence prevention advocates and activist scholars from Latino and other settler backgrounds living on Treaty 7 territory in Canada, we sought to design, implement and evaluate a well-being group for Latino-Canadian men.

Our objective through the Latino Men's Support Group was to develop local knowledge on how to create a men's well-being group which is culturally relevant, appropriate and impactful for Latino men and families in Canada. We brought forward these ideas of inclusivity and cultural relevance into the Support Group as a way to transgress emotionally repressive gender norms and build emotional comfort to share experiences within the group.

## CURRICULUM OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

The Latino Men's Support Group program is intended to facilitate constructive conversations with men using a culturally and linguistically supportive framework. Men have the opportunity to learn new skills for their well-being and learn from each other's wisdom. A key learning is a deepened ability for self-reflection, which is a beneficial skill to understand and integrate past experiences. A key objective of the Group is to reframe narratives into a healthier way of perceiving oneself and others.

The intent of this program is to promote well-being, healthy relationships, compassion, healthy communication, emotional connections, safety, and trust. We begin by talking with the men about exploring their own upbringing, understanding and recognizing the relationship between emotions and sensations, cognitive "self-talk", and how these translate into specific behaviors.

The Support Group fosters the development of new skills and safer behaviours to assist participants to become more empathetic and compassionate.



Every session features a distinct theme with particular focus on breathing, body sensations, mindfulness, and visualizations, as well as feedback and reflections. An important component is the group practices a weekly commitment, while setting goals for the following week based on new learnings. The following graphic illustrates the flow of each module. Each module begins with introductions and a review of the previous week's commitments, and ends with new commitments for the following week, and feedback session and closing circle.



## CURRICULUM MODULES

### 1. Welcome and introduction - Learning to be safe

The first module focuses on introductions to the program, facilitators, and participants, with a collective activity that helps set guidelines, and a group commitment to respect and follow these guidelines. This session invites participants to take ownership of the group, establishing their own safe environment that allows for free, open, and respectful sharing. This is achieved through recognition of what feels unsafe, and what the group identifies as ways to stay safe, and is crucial to the creation of a sense of safety and support in a respectful environment. Participants are introduced to various grounding exercises including breathing and body scan and make commitments to practice these learnings over the next week.

## **2. Life in the new country**

The next module explores the immigration experience, including challenges and barriers people face (social, economic, professional, and family) and the beliefs and expectations about coming to a new country. The effects of stress on the body are introduced, and coping strategies in response to stress are explored. The group reviews the guidelines established from the previous week and makes amendments as needed, as well as also reviewing their commitments from the past week. The group also explores breathing and body awareness, and makes new commitments to practice for the next week.

## **3. Recognizing and understanding emotions**

This module introduces psychosocial and physiological learning about how the body responds to crisis, and the effects of stress and trauma on brain development. The fight, flight or freeze response is discussed, and participants begin making connections between thoughts, emotions, and behavior. This session also introduces the first mindfulness exercise using a mandarin, along with further breathing, body scans, and grounding activities. The session concludes with a reflection of what participants were taught and learned in the past, a review of their learnings from the session, and a commitment to practice one of these mindfulness exercises during the week.

## **4. Family of origin, values and beliefs**

This session gives participants the opportunity to talk about their family history, and the origins behind their beliefs and value systems. Participants learn about masculinity, fatherhood, and reflect on their perceptions about a male's role in a household, and are challenged to identify their own patterns of behavior and how those behaviors may or may not benefit their family. The group brainstorms "What it Means to be a Man", and facilitators guide them through the process of visualizing their life with parents or guardians. More grounding exercises are practiced, and the group reflects on their learning and sets goals and commitments for the coming week to practice new skills and activities.

## **5. Self-Care and masculinities**

Session five focuses on fostering discussions around self-care and masculinities, or the way that modes of thoughts and behavior unique to the country of origin are reconciled with the normative behavior of Canada, with particular attention to how ideas and habits can limit one's ability to take care of themselves. The group discusses safe ways of dealing with stress and recognizing their survival skills. Men are asked to brainstorm the needs and affections of a child, and then guided to visualize their own inner child so they can then practice self-care. Conversation is grounded in childhood memories and the modes of self-care that we learn from parents. There are further breathing exercises, and the group concludes with reflection, goal setting, the commitment for the week, and participant feedback.

## **6. Managing stress and conflict**

This session features discussions surrounding boundaries and respect, anger management, and the neuroscience of self-regulation. Facilitators aim to build awareness on the impact of violence on families and communities, as well as teach concepts like the power wheel and cycle of violence. Participants learn to recognize their basic needs, false expectations, and frustrations. The difference between reactive and conscious responses to stress are explored. They are invited to take responsibility for the decisions they make in responding to different situations. More breathing, relaxation, and tense muscle exercises are introduced, and loving thoughts are practiced. Participants are given the opportunity to provide feedback, reflect on their learning, and set goals and make commitments for the next session.

## **7. Effective communication and positive relationships**

Session seven explores communication styles and conflict resolution. Facilitators introduce the concept of assertive communication and working towards conflict resolution. Concepts such as respect, uniqueness and responsibility are explored. Participants are guided through sensory awareness exercises, and then divided into pairs for an active listening activity. They explore the importance of good communication on healthy relationships and practice some new skills. The session concludes with a review of commitments for the week, feedback, and goal setting.

## **8. Caring Parenting**

Participants are tasked with brainstorming what it means to be a good father, while also being challenged on how they learned to be a father. Concepts like the Nurturing Father and positive parenting are explored, and participants are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and learned parenting behaviors from their parents. This session also explores child brain development in nurturing households. Participants engage in breathing and meditation exercises, visualization of their own life through time, and recognizing mentors. They reflect on their learning as a group and make commitments for the week.

## **9. Strength and Resilience**

This session focuses primarily on building positive coping behaviors. Participants practice mindfulness and are asked to consider their strengths and highlight their own resiliency. Concepts such as “choosing glasses with which to see the world” are explored, with a particular focus on positive psychology and thinking. Participants engage in activities around love, gratitude, and positive affirmation. Facilitators explain how our bodies thrive in a more positive environment that we can create. Narratives of life are challenged and participants are invited to focus on loving memories. An exercise, the “line of life” is practiced, and the group closes with reflection, feedback, and a commitment for the week.

## 10. Healthy Relationships and Graduation ceremony

The final session explores goals, expectations, and relationships. Participants are challenged to consider what beliefs they hold that prevent them from being the best person they can be. They brainstorm the question “who am I”, and are guided through an alignment activity, “The tree of life”. Concepts such as empathy, compassion, and expectations of partners are explored in detail, participants reflect on their learning over the course of the past 10 weeks, and complete detailed feedback forms for facilitators, as well as post-test scales. A small graduation ceremony is celebrated.

# SUPPORT GROUP EVALUATION

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The Latino Men’s Support Group was held on Monday evenings starting in July through to September, 2019, with participant information collected at the beginning and end of the group. Between 4 and 10 participants attended each session, and all participants submitted weekly evaluation and feedback forms. Three months after completing the group, participants were invited for a focus group to evaluate the changes that had occurred and support the ongoing peer support that emerged from the group.

### Demographic information

The men in this group are originally from a handful of Latin American and Caribbean countries: 4 from Mexico, 2 from El Salvador, 2 from Venezuela, 1 from Colombia, and 1 from the Dominican Republic. The majority of the men had been in Canada for at least 13 years (80%); 20% have lived in Canada for one year or less. Participants ranged in age from 33 to 59 years old, (average 49 years old). 60% of the men were married while 30% were separated or divorced, and the remaining 10% of the members were single.

## Participant Feedback

For each module, there was a 100% participation rate in the feedback process. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of participants agreeing they “learned something new” throughout the experience at every single session. These findings indicated a potential benefit for participants of community support groups.

► **What issues are men facing?**

Men entered the space seeking supports and wellness. A key theme expressed by participants was to “manejar el estrés” (managing stress related to social, economic, familial, and even professional factors). Men sought support for issues related to anger management, recognizing emotions and feelings of powerlessness, and gaining control of overreactive behavior. Difficulties in interpersonal relationships related to parenthood and family were identified and explored. Above all, participants sought to achieve wellness in their lives.

► **What skills gained through the Support Group are helping participants work through these issues?**

Participants expressed enthusiastic support for the various grounding exercises completed by the group, with a particular appreciation for the activities rooted in physicality, such as breath and breathing control, body scan, and sensations. The group identified mindfulness practice as a helpful skill towards observing and identifying reactive behavior. Men sought to “reconociendo los sentimientos” (recognize their feelings in order to develop a more conscious reaction to stress and crisis). However, the most powerful protective factor that emerged from the group was the sense of camaraderie and peer support amongst participants, as they identified relying on the openness and respect of other group members for their continued commitment.

► **What kind of supports do men need?**

This Support Group was successful because it featured an open forum founded on principles of respect, participation, and a commitment to the group and learning experience. The men described the “creación de un espacio de autoconocimiento” (the creation of a space that facilitated and respected one’s self-knowledge and self-awareness). Participants were invited to take ownership over the therapeutic environment and their own learning. They were provided with access to information and opportunities to learn about the brain mechanisms behind stress and anger, and gain a biological and neuroscientific understanding of the effects of emotions on wellness. The group encouraged an attitude of “pensamientos positivos” (positive thinking) that allowed for a self and welcoming space where men could discuss issues related to fatherhood, family of origin, male identity, masculinity, racism, role models and relationships.

## Conclusion

The 2015 Alberta Men's Survey highlighted the need for increased community supports for men across a wide variety of cultural backgrounds (Lorenzetti et al., 2021). Fanny Oliphant and her co-facilitators identified a need within their Latino community for men to have an outlet and opportunity to share and talk about their concerns, challenges, and success; as well as being able to learn from each other's experiences. The Latino Men's Support Group and its curriculum have since been adapted to meet the needs of wider cross-cultural, gender and sexually diverse groups in the community by exploring the shared experience of life in the time of COVID-19 as a central theme. Furthermore, Fanny Oliphant has assembled a curriculum guide to be used as a tool to support community practitioners in implementing their own culturally specific support groups in their own communities and build capacity in group facilitation. The Latino Support Group is an excellent example of how community survey information can translate directly into program development when practitioners can identify a need in their communities and aim to fill gaps in service delivery.

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