



## Indigenous health

**Do you support government working in partnership with Indigenous nations to address urgent health needs identified by them, such as the ongoing crisis of children and youth suicide?**

**Will you commit to supporting the transformation of our health system from a colonial approach to an Indigenous-led self-governance model?**

### Truth and reconciliation

After a six-year process of hearing from more than 6,750 survivors of residential schools,<sup>1</sup> the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its 94 calls to action in June 2015.<sup>2 3</sup> On August 24, 2015, the Chiefs of Ontario<sup>4</sup> and the Government of Ontario<sup>5</sup> formally signed a historic political accord<sup>6</sup> to guide the government-to-government relationship between First Nations and the province. Ontario's First Nations Health Action Plan was announced on May 25, 2016 to address health inequities and improve access to services, including life promotion and crisis support. The action plan was accompanied by a \$222 million commitment over three years followed by ongoing funding of \$104.5 million annually.<sup>7 8</sup> On May 30, 2016 the Ontario government made a formal apology for the past, and the continuing harm that generations of systemic abuse has caused to Indigenous communities, families, and individuals.<sup>9</sup> At that time, the province also released Ontario's response to the TRC, *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*,<sup>10</sup> along with an investment of more than \$250 million over three years for action on reconciliation to be developed and evaluated with Indigenous partners.<sup>11</sup>

### Moving from perpetual crisis to Indigenous self-determination in health

The legacy of intergenerational trauma from the residential school system, colonialism, and racism has resulted in Indigenous people experiencing tremendous inequities in health and social outcomes. One alarming example is that suicide rates are up to seven times higher for First Nations youth compared with non-Indigenous youth.<sup>12</sup> In February 2016, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Territory and the Sioux Lookout region declared a health and public health emergency.<sup>13 14 15</sup> NAN reported there had been 543 suicides of people of all ages in their territories since 1986.<sup>16</sup> From January to July 2017 alone, there were 22 suicides, of which eight were children between the ages of 10 to 15 years.<sup>17</sup>

On July 24, 2017 NAN Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler ceremonially signed an agreement with the Ontario and federal health ministers to work towards transforming health services in the 49 communities that make up NAN.<sup>18</sup> This Charter of Relationship Principles for Nishnawbe Aski Nation Territory is “a concrete sign” of a “renewed multilateral nation to nation relationship.”<sup>19</sup>



Ontario's Minister of Health and Long-Term Care Eric Hoskins acknowledged that “the colonial health system that was set up and currently exists...is not serving First Nations communities well.”<sup>20</sup> A joint statement on July 24, 2017 by the provincial Ministers of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Health and Long-Term Care, and Children and Youth Services announced additional actions and funding to address “the youth suicide crisis in northern First Nations (that) is nothing short of a health and social emergency.”<sup>21</sup> The government of Ontario made a clear promise:<sup>22</sup>

Ontario is committed to providing immediate support to First Nations in crisis. However, we feel strongly that emergencies will continue to occur and intensify unless meaningful and dramatic realignment and transformation happens to change the status quo and address the systemic disparities facing Indigenous communities, particularly in northern First Nations. It is not up to First Nations to right the wrongs of colonization. Governments must invest in meaningful and lasting Indigenous-led solutions so communities can heal and young people can have hope for a brighter future.

*Statement by Ministers of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Health and Long-Term Care and Children and Youth Services, July 24, 2017*

### **RNAO's INDIGENOUS HEALTH ASKS**

As an ally organization, RNAO is committed to advocating for and supporting Indigenous leadership in health in the spirit of reconciliation and so urges:

- Governments to partner with Indigenous nations to address urgent health needs identified by them such as the ongoing crisis of children and youth suicide
- Transformation of our health system from its colonial approach into an Indigenous-led self-governance model



## NOTES FOR RNAO LEADERS

### They say, we say

#### Where can I learn more about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)?

The [final report](#) of the TRC, [executive summary](#), [principles](#), [survivors speak](#), and [calls to action](#) are available through the archived [TRC website](#) and at the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#).

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#### Where can I learn more about improving my nursing practice with respect to Indigenous cultural safety?

- [Ontario Indigenous Cultural Safety Program](#): an interactive, online training program for professionals working in the Ontario health system
- [Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association](#)



## References:

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