



Indigenous health

Will you work to ensure that Ontario continues to implement recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada?

Do you support government partnering with Indigenous nations to address urgent health and social challenges such as the ongoing crisis of children and youth suicide?

After a six-year process of hearing from more than 6,750 survivors of residential schools,¹ the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released 94 calls to action in June 2015.^{2 3} On August 24, 2015, the Chiefs of Ontario⁴ and the Government of Ontario⁵ formally signed a historic political accord⁶ to guide the government-to-government relationship between First Nations and the province. Ontario's First Nations Health Action Plan was announced with funding on May 25, 2016 to address health inequities and improve access to services, including life promotion and crisis support.^{7 8} On May 30, 2016, the provincial government, with the support of the opposition parties, made a formal apology for the past and ongoing harm that generations of systemic abuse has caused to Indigenous communities, families, and individuals.⁹ At that time, the province released Ontario's response to the TRC, *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous People*.¹⁰

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 five to seven times higher for First Nations youth compared with non-Indigenous youth.¹¹ In February 2016, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Territory and the Sioux Lookout region declared a health and public health emergency.^{12 13 14} NAN reports there have been 562 suicides in their territories (49 communities in northern Ontario) since 1986.¹⁵ Of those lives lost since 1986, 87 were of children between the ages of 10 to 14 years, according to NAN's data.¹⁶

RNAO's INDIGENOUS HEALTH ASKS

RNAO is committed to advocating for and supporting Indigenous leadership in health in the spirit of reconciliation and urges:

- Ongoing commitment and action from all levels of government to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada;
- Action on the health and social challenges identified by Indigenous nations, such as the ongoing crisis of children and youth suicide.
- Encourage and support Indigenous people's rights to self governance and self determination.

NOTES FOR RNAO LEADERS

They say, we say

This section is for RNAO leaders only. It provides additional information and suggested responses for statements we may receive about this issue.

Why is it important for RNAO and its members to continue to support truth and reconciliation?

One of the provincial government's first actions after the June 2018 election was to disband the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and fold it into the ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines. That action is a concerning signal that improving relations with Indigenous Peoples is not a priority for the Ford government. Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said, "It is difficult to see how progress can continue to be made when our interests are reduced to only be of importance insofar as they relate to the government's ability to access the resources within our lands."¹⁷ Indigenous educators, elders, and leaders were disappointed in a last-minute cancellation of curriculum writing sessions to update curriculum in response to the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) calls to action.¹⁸ This was perceived by Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler as "a second step backward...on our journey towards reconciliation in Ontario."¹⁹

Why isn't RNAO outlining a more comprehensive list of actions that need to be taken in this backgrounder?

Consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,²⁰ RNAO is committed to supporting Indigenous peoples in self-determination. Adverse health outcomes are a direct result of trauma caused by colonization. TRC call to action #18 urges "the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties."²¹

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

The [final report](#), [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](#).

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

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

References:

- ¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). TRC releases call to action to begin reconciliation. Retrieved from [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/TRCReportPressRelease%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/TRCReportPressRelease%20(1).pdf).
- ² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to action*. Retrieved from http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf.
- ³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *TRC final report*. Retrieved from <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>.
- ⁴ Chiefs of Ontario. (2015). The political accord. Retrieved from <http://www.chiefs-of-ontario.org/node/1168>.
- ⁵ Ontario Office of the Premier. (2015). First Nations, Ontario sign political accord. Retrieved from <https://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2015/08/first-nations-ontario-sign-political-accord.html>.
- ⁶ Chiefs of Ontario. (2015). *Political accord between First Nations and the Government of Ontario*. Retrieved from <http://www.chiefs-of-ontario.org/sites/default/files/files/Political%20Accord-FINAL-AUGUST2015.pdf>.
- ⁷ Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC). (2016). Ontario launches \$222 million First Nations Health Action Plan. Retrieved from <https://news.ontario.ca/mohltc/en/2016/05/ontario-launches-222-million-first-nations-health-action-plan.html>.
- ⁸ MOHLTC. (2016). Backgrounder: Indigenous health investments to focus on four priority areas. Retrieved from <https://news.ontario.ca/mohltc/en/2016/05/indigenous-health-investments-to-focus-on-four-priority-areas.html>.
- ⁹ Hansard. (2016, May 30). Legislative Assembly of Ontario. First Session, 41st Parliament, 9623-9625. <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/house-documents/parliament-41/session-1/2016-05-30/hansard>
- ¹⁰ Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. (2016). *The journey together: Ontario's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/journey-together-ontarios-commitment-reconciliation-indigenous-peoples>.
- ¹¹ Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. (2016). *The journey together: Ontario's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*, p22. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/journey-together-ontarios-commitment-reconciliation-indigenous-peoples>.
- ¹² NishnawbeAski Nation. (2016). News release: First Nation leaders declare health and public health emergency. Retrieved from <http://www.nan.on.ca/upload/documents/comms-2016-02-24-health-emergency.pdf>.
- ¹³ NishnawbeAski Nation & Sioux Lookout Area Chiefs Committee on Health. (2016). *Declaration of a health and public health emergency in NishnawbeAski Nation (NAN) Territory and the Sioux Lookout Region*. Retrieved from <http://www.nan.on.ca/upload/documents/comms-2016-02-24declaration-health-emerg.pdf>.
- ¹⁴ NishnawbeAski Nation & Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority. *Backgrounder: Health and public health emergency*. Retrieved from <http://www.nan.on.ca/upload/documents/comms-2016-02-24-backgrounder-health-eme.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ Troian, M. (2018, March 27). Data reveals close to 600 suicides in northern Ontario since the mid-1980's. *APTN*. <http://aptnews.ca/2018/03/27/data-reveals-close-600-suicides-northern-ontario-since-mid-1980s/>
- ¹⁶ Troian, Data reveals close to 600 suicides in northern Ontario since the mid-1980's.

¹⁷ NishnawbeAski Nation. (2018, June 29). News release: New provincial cabinet a step backwards for Indigenous relations. <http://www.nan.on.ca/article/june-29-2018-22612.asp>

¹⁸ Johnson, R. (2018, July 9). Indigenous educators puzzled, disappointed after Ontario cancels TRC curriculum writing sessions. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/ontario-indigenous-curriculum-writing-cancellation-1.4739691>

¹⁹ Fiddler, A. & Moran, R. (2018, July 11). Doug Ford needs education on reconciliation. *Toronto Star*. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2018/07/11/doug-ford-needs-education-on-reconciliation.html>

²⁰ United Nations (2008). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

²¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to action*, 2.