

Indigenous Residential Schools



In the 1800s, as an act of cultural genocide, the colonial government of what would become Canada instituted a system of Indigenous residential schools. Residential schools were created to separate Indigenous children from their families, in order to minimize family ties and take away the children's unique view of the world as Indigenous peoples. Methods to indoctrinate children into the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society were harsh and incomprehensible. Children were physically, sexually and emotionally abused in residential schools, often resulting in tragic deaths.

Many successive generations of children from the same communities and families endured the experience of the schools. The last residential school was closed only in 1996. Children, grandchildren and other family members of residential school survivors continue to suffer from intergenerational trauma.

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In recent months, unmarked graves of more than 1,000 children have been uncovered at the grounds of former residential schools. To the knowledge of Indigenous community leaders, these missing children were undocumented deaths.

The announcement of these findings was overwhelming to thousands of Canadians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. For school survivors and their families, the announcement was horrific and re-traumatizing. **The discovery of these young children strongly echoes the often unspoken knowledge of Canada's Indigenous peoples; residential schools offer a legacy of suffering, death and cultural genocide.** The finding of the unmarked graves has created an energy that asks all Canadians to honour the courage of these young victims and to actively commit to and work towards reconciliation.

The **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)** was created by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The TRC spent six years travelling to all parts of Canada to hear from the Indigenous peoples who had been taken from their families as children, forcibly if necessary, and placed for much of their childhoods in residential schools.

The TRC was completed in 2015 and set out the history of Indian residential schools, its mistreatment of Indigenous children and its legacy of suffering. The TRC identified 94 calls-to-action, consistent with the principles set out by the TRC, for all levels of government to address, as appropriate. The calls-to-action address issues such as health, child welfare, child education, language and culture, and others. These calls-to-action were to be addressed to complete the reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. But fulfilling the calls-to-action has been slow. There has been a lack of commitment and timely action in implementing these recommendations for reconciliation.

Call to action

RNAO apologizes and commits to reconciliation:

RNAO acknowledges this isn't just our history. It is also our present.

- The colonization of this land has taken from Indigenous peoples' ways of life, ways of knowing, ways of healing and has had a destructive impact on the education, culture and languages, justice systems, and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples.
- RNAO acknowledges that the nursing profession, and abusive treatment of Indigenous peoples by nurses, is part of this history. **For this, we apologize deeply and we commit to repair.**

RNAO supports the implementation of TRC's seven health-related calls-of-action

- RNAO will continue its efforts to build a respectful relationship with the Indigenous peoples of this land so that we can, in the words of the authors of the TRC report, "restore what must be restored, repair what must be repaired, and return what must be returned."
- Thus, RNAO supports the implementation of the seven health-related calls to action set out in the TRC report, based on the principle that reconciliation requires constructive action to address the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have led to the poor outcomes of Indigenous peoples' health.

RNAO will continue to listen to the Indigenous peoples of this land

- RNAO stands with the Indigenous peoples of this land in mourning the lives lost and recognizes and shares the enormous and enduring pain caused by the residential school system.
- **We will continue to listen to the Indigenous peoples of this land** as the truth of Canada's history is told by the residential school survivors and as the truth of this history is revealed by recent findings and those still to come.

RNAO calls on all levels of government to:

- Support Canada's Indigenous peoples to investigate the unmarked gravesites currently found and to search for other burial sites on the grounds of the remaining residential schools.
- Abide by the principles of TRC as laid out in the report and provide necessary funding and other supports to create an equitable and inclusive society by ensuring the 94 calls-to-action are acted on now.