

OPHA's Resolution on the Public Health Response to the Truth and Reconciliation's Calls to Action



Background:

On December 15, 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its final report on Canada's Indian Residential Schools (IRS) (1). The TRC was constituted and created by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The TRC spent six years travelling to all parts of Canada and heard from more than 6,000 witnesses, most of whom survived the experience of living in the schools as students. Aboriginal people had been taken from their families as children, forcibly if necessary, and placed for much of their childhoods in residential schools. The federal government has estimated that at least 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit students passed through the system for more than 100 years (2).

The Final Report discusses what the Commission did and how it went about its work, as well as what it heard, read, and concluded about the schools and afterwards, based on all the evidence available to it. The TRC's mandate included truth telling of experiences of survivors, as well as a focus on reconciliation (2).

Reconciliation was an overall objective of the TRC (3). As Canadians and as Treaty Peoples, we all have on-going individual and collective responsibilities to come to terms with events of the past, and begin establishing respectful and healthy relationships with Indigenous communities.

To quote the TRC:

"Reconciliation is going to take hard work. People of all walks of life and at all levels of society will need to be willingly engaged. Reconciliation calls for personal action. People need to get to know each other. They need to learn how to speak to, and about, each other respectfully. They need to learn how to speak knowledgeably about the history of this country. And they need to ensure that their children learn how to do so as well..."

Reconciliation calls for federal, provincial, and territorial government action.

Reconciliation calls for national action.

The way we govern ourselves must change. Laws must change.

Policies and programs must change.

The way we educate our children and ourselves must change.

The way we do business must change.

Thinking must change.

The way we talk to, and about, each other must change.

All Canadians must make a firm and lasting commitment to reconciliation to ensure that Canada is a country where our children and grandchildren can thrive."

Ninety-four Calls to Action for Canadians were released to begin redressing the legacy of Indian Residential Schools and advancing the process of reconciliation. The TRC also released a set of guiding principles to move forward on truth and reconciliation. The alpha-OPHA Health Equity Workgroup spent a portion of its monthly meetings from February 2016 to February 2017 reading the 94 Calls to Action and discussing each Call and the role of public health. At the same

time, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has released a draft of the Modernized Standards for Public Health Programs and Services: Consultation Document (4). This Resolution is one step for OPHA to begin their process towards reconciliation. It will not be the last.

1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Website Homepage*. Retrieved March 33, 2017:
<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>
2. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future: Summary Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. McGill-Queen's University Press. Retrieved March 13, 2017:
[http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring the Truth Reconciling for the Future July 23 2015.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf)
3. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation, The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Volume 6*. McGill-Queen's University Press. Retrieved March 13, 2017:
[http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Volume 6 Reconciliation English Web.pdf](http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Volume_6_Reconciliation_English_Web.pdf)
4. Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. *Standards for Public Health Programs and Services: Consultation Document*. Planning and Performance Branch, Population and Public Health Division. February 17, 2017.

Resolution:

Whereas the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released a report documenting the voices of survivors of Indian Residential Schools; and

Whereas the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released 94 Calls to Actions as part of the process for reconciliation; and

Whereas The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society; and

Whereas First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected; and

Whereas the modernized Standards for Public Health Programs and Services recognize the requirement for boards of health to engage with Indigenous communities in ways that are meaningful for them; and

Whereas all public health professionals must examine their role in the truth and reconciliation process; and

Whereas understanding and addressing attitudinal and systemic racism is a critical area for public health action;

Be it resolved that OPHA acknowledge the harm colonization and the residential school system caused and continues to cause to Canada's Indigenous people;

Be it further resolved that OPHA achieve Indigenous Cultural Competency in its planning, implementation, and evaluation of all program(s), activities, and policies;

Be it further resolved that OPHA engage with Indigenous partners in a way that is meaningful for them;

Be it further resolved that OPHA advocate to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and other relevant government bodies, to ensure that Ontario's Indigenous people have equitable access to the social determinants of health as well as access to the cultural safe health care and Indigenous healing practices;

Be it further resolved that OPHA advocate to boards of health to

- Committing to reading and to understanding the Calls to Action and the role that boards of health can play as part of reconciliation;
- Ensuring that all staff and board members are Indigenous Culturally Competent to act as better allies and provide culturally safe care to the Indigenous people within the areas of their geographic responsibility;

- Assessing the unique health needs and health inequities experienced by Indigenous people;
- Modifying and reorienting public health interventions to be culturally safe for Indigenous people;
- Engaging with Indigenous communities in a way that is meaningful for them;
- Supporting policy development and health equity analysis to decrease health inequities experienced by Indigenous people;

Be it further resolved that OPHA request that Public Health Ontario and the Association of Public Health Epidemiologists of Ontario engage with Indigenous population health expertise, including those at the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCA) to advise and assist the field on how Ontario's public health sector can best participate in TRC Call to Action #19 which calls on the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal peoples, to establish measurable goals to redress the health inequities and to report annually on the progress being made here in Ontario;

Be it further resolved that OPHA advocate to universities providing training to future public health professionals to include a mandatory Indigenous Health course. Such a course would include at minimum, Indigenous health issues, history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, and Indigenous teachings and practices, as well as Indigenous cultural safety, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.